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ANIMATO!

The Animation Fan's Magazine

Here Be Monsters: The Life and Times of Phil Tippett



©Tippett Studios

Phil Tippett (left) Supervisor of "Draco" Design and Animatics with Peter Konig, Character Designer and Sculptor, stand with the final design used in *Dragonheart*.



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Stephen R. Bissette interviews the rising star of stop-motion animation.

Arabian Knight-Mare: Richard Williams' Lost Masterpiece
Everything You Wanted To Know About *Davey and Goliath*
Meet The Man Behind The Brain: Maurice LaMarche

Animator J.J. Sedelmaier Profiled



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ANIMATO!

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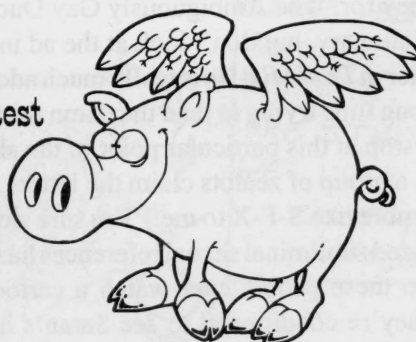
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To Draw, Partner?
You'd Enter A Contest
When Pigs Fly?
Check Out Page 9
For Our Young Gag
Writers' Contest.**



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About the Cover...

One of the rising stars of three
dimensional and computer animation,
Phil Tippett, is pictured in this behind-
the-scenes shot from the production of
Dragonheart. (© Tippett Studio)

PUBLISHER TORIAL



Do you remember the folks that wanted to cover the Washington Monument and put bras on cows? Well, they're back and it's the end of civilization! Betty Boop topless and Jessica Rabbit pantless in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit!* Dusty (not lusty) S-E-X in *The Lion King!* A phallic castle spire (Is there any other kind?) on the video box for *The Little Mermaid!* A "Rigid Tools" poster in the Roger Rabbit short *Trail Mix-Up*.

With all the truly evil conditions in the world, a group of concerned citizens manage to find sexual content in cartoons. The situation is more horrifying, to some, because it's (Gasp!) Disney. Everybody knows Disney animation is supposed to be for (wringing of hands) children.

Is this a carefully orchestrated plot by Eisner to warp the minds of innocent children? (The American Family Association thinks so.)

Or... Is Eisner counting on anal-retentive religious fanatics finding subtle plants in Disney animation? It certainly won't hurt sales if word gets out there's something "taboo" in the Roger Rabbit compilation.

Or... Is it merely animators having a bit of fun with a long-standing tradition of getting in-jokes by the censors. You be the judge. Threat or trick or treat?

As I penned this column, Don Wildmon's May Action Page from the American Family Association crossed my desk. Basically, a laundry list of Disney "sins" centering on anti-family programs and the so-called Disney Homosexual Agenda. Also included is a call for donations and a boycott letter to be signed, sealed and sent to Mike Eisner. I will try to address Don Wildmon's raging homophobia at a later date. For now, I'll concentrate on the animated stuff.

Under the heading Children's Animated Movies, AFA lists the now-famous video box art for *The Little Mermaid*. I have an original artwork *Mermaid* video box. I didn't notice the the phallus until someone pointed it out to me. Without a doubt, you have to be actively searching for phallic symbols. (There is a rumor that the person responsible is still with Disney.) This whole magilla deserves more discussion.

Also mentioned is a scene from *Mermaid* wherein "a priest becomes noticeably aroused while presiding over a wedding." This was news to us at ANIMATO! We thought we knew of all the "incidents" in animated film. (We even know of a few that haven't been discovered yet.) If you cue only the wedding sequence of Eric and Vanessa, it looks from the point-of-view used the short bishop has indeed become aroused. However, not unlike quoting someone out of context, this isn't the true picture. When we ran the sequence for friends to get a reaction, Marjory Bleier immediately suggested letting the video run to view a different scene with the bishop. Sure enough, the clergyman is shown to have short legs and knobby knees which tend to flex and protrude from his abdomen!

Let's move to AFA's big gripe with *Pocahontas*. Here's the direct quote: "Fact: In *Pocahontas*, Disney censored out the historical fact that the heroine in the story converted from paganism to Christianity." (For a Methodist minister, Wildmon doesn't seem too tolerant of Native American beliefs.) What a shock! A Hollywood feature that omits or takes liberties with historical fact.

The AFA was also incensed at Disney for "The Ambiguously Gay Duo" and their genital shaped automobile. Don, please look up the word *satire* in the dictionary, but don't look at the ad inside our front cover.

The noise about the "rigid tools" poster in *Trail Mix-Up* is really much ado about nothing. If someone hadn't mentioned the word "rigid," I would have spent a long time trying to read the damn thing. The poster itself is so subtle and muted it's a wonder anyone had the inclination to stop at this particular point in the short.

According to a newspaper clipping, a group of zealots claim the letters S, E, then X appear in a dust cloud raised by young Simba in *The Lion King*. (Looks more like S-F-X to me.) I'm sure slogging through feature length animation one-frame-at-a-time looking for real or imagined subliminal sexual references has a certain attraction for those individuals with plenty of time on their idle hands. Do these people ever watch a cartoon for pure enjoyment? You know—Fun! Entertainment! The sad part is once they're conditioned to see Satan's hand everywhere they probably never enjoy animation at face value. Pity.

In fairness to *Ghost in the Shell*, it features some very stylish CGI, although as usual it's the bits you don't notice that are most impressive.

As a rather formal means of reconciliation, I am including the shows that I left out of the last article. It's only fair to put them under the same scrutiny, eh?

Ever notice how some shows are ever-so-close to being good? *Creepy Crawlers* is one of those rare shows that is *this* close to being bad. Simpleton villains, cornball storylines, run-of-the-mill execution. So what's to like? Well, since the beginning *CC* has been keeping its head above water with the moderately appealing heroes and their occasionally amusing dialogue. I know that there is at least one episode that

Box office beast in Europe, box office bust on these shores, the *Highlander* series of movies are as disaffected a franchise as any in recent

memory. *Highlander: The Animated Series*, by the same token, is as disaffected an animated series as any in my recent memory. Sci-fi slop with an emotionless execution, this syndicated acquisition from the USA Network is as tediously tiresome as science fiction can possibly be.



The story behind *The Tick* is a sad story of betrayal, misdirection, and shortsightedness. The first six or so episodes of this superhero parody were downright hilarious more often than not. Director Art Vitello and head writers Ben Edlund and Richard Liebmann-Smith were in their prime consistently dishing out inspired jocularly. After then, however, the proverbial toilet had flushed on this series as the show's humor went down the drain. "Spoon!" became the battle cry and "Hey!" aliens did battle with the extraterrestrial "What?"s; and the whole time we were being told that this was funny. You make the call.

Does *Where on Earth is Carmen Sandiego?* sound like the best show of the year? Well, good intentions may have let Carmen steal away the Emmy, but nothing about the show's last two seasons has done much to provide the proof in the pudding. The formula of National Geographic didacticism interspersed with kiddie-level stories doesn't sound very catchy — and it isn't, especially when compared to the show's very entertaining debut season. I'll admit it: Native American stuff is interesting, but Zack's bouts with bad luck are not.

Report from New York

Eric Lurio

New York, NY

Why do feature cartoons almost always come out in bunches? On March 29th three, count 'em, three opened simultaneously in movie theaters. MGM's *All Dogs Go to Heaven 2*, Disney's *Oliver & Co.*, and from the land of the rising sun, *The Ghost in the Shell*.

Why did this happen? I dunno. It didn't have to happen this way. *Oliver* was supposed to be re-released a couple of weeks later according to the trades, and the only reason I can think of is to spike *All Dogs 2*. Why try to spike somebody else's film? Fear? Malice? After all, *All Dogs* isn't going to outdo *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, or even *Oliver* for that matter...

All Dogs Go to Heaven 2 isn't a bad little film. The animation is nice, the music's above average and actually advances the plot, which is pedestrian but interesting enough for little kids, and has wonderfully impressionist backgrounds.

AD2 is a historical artifact, it's the last film to be animated at what was once Don Bluth's Dublin studio. MGM got the facility when Don Bluth went under, and used it to complete the box office flop, *The Pebble and the Penguin*. With *Pebble* finished, the facility needed another project to avoid shutting down. With Disney doing a made for video sequel to *Aladdin*, some suit decided MGM should do one for one of its hits. A quick search showed that 1989's *All Dogs go to Heaven* was the only one available.

With the possibility of a full scale animation boom in the offing, it was decided to upgrade the project to a theatrical feature, and soon after

production began, financial difficulties caused the shut-down of the Dublin facility and the project moved to the new studio in LA, which had been doing awful Pink Panther shorts for TV. According to the trades, the film was supposed to come out last fall, but it was delayed to the spring. Even so, it barely came out on time.

The plot, such as it is, goes something like this: Charley Barkin, voiced by Charley Sheen, is still dead, and isn't very happy about it. The opening number, "It's Too Heavenly Here", sez it all, Heaven is hell. The villain, Carface (voiced by Ernest Borgnine) steals Gabriel's horn, which opens the pearly gates, loses it and Charley and his newly dead pal Itchy (Dom Deluise) are sent through a plot hole big enough to drive a Mac truck through down to San Francisco to retrieve it.

Charley doesn't give a fig about Gabriel's horn, and in an attempt to get laid, gets involved with a bitch (original definition) named Sasha (Sheena Easton) who's taking care of a runaway little boy named David (Adam Wylie) and it all follows from there until the climax in which Alcatraz temporarily sinks beneath the sea and the happy ending. Like I said, good but not great. It'll do well on video as will *The Ghost in the Shell*, which Manga video got into theaters for a week to garner reviews for the back of the box.

The title has to do with the construction of the protagonist, a cyborg machine with a human soul (ghost) and some brain cells. This is allegedly the most expensive anime ever made. It doesn't look it. True, the backgrounds are photographic looking. But the CGI looks like it was photographed from a TV screen and the animation, when everything isn't standing still, looks rotoscoped.

This is anime, you expect that, and it would be fine had there not been far too many "exposition breaks" where the characters just sit there and explain the backstory. Boring!

The plot is muddled. Apparently, section nine, which specializes in bumping off foreign diplomats, is searching for an evil American hacker called the puppet master. PM is putting viruses into translators and garbage men and has to be stopped. In reality, he's not a hacker at all, but a nefarious computer program who's generated his own soul and now wants a body so he could defect to Japan. Equal rights for software? Yeesh!

Of course, the body he finds is a buxom blond bombshell robot, whose breasts are clearly visible when it's interrogated. It gets caught when it gets hit by a truck when trying to cross the street naked.

The climax, with lots of extraneous explosions ends with a the cyborg cop and the PM having cybersex of a sort. Silly is good but only when it's intentional, like Urusei Yantsura, for instance.

The shock is that the least of the three films is Disney's. *Oliver & Co.* is on the level with *AD2*, but isn't as interesting and despite the talents of Huey Lewis and Billy Joel, doesn't have as good music. True, it was Katzenberg's first toon, and yes it is fun in places, but when the comparison is to *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*, which isn't fair, it just doesn't measure up.

The fact that *AD2* is the first non-Disney toon to crack the top ten at the box office in years is a good sign for the industry.. Next up *Beavis and Butthead Do America* and *Space Jam*, both of which come out in the fall.

Son of Correction

Bob Wilkie

Toronto, Canada

In your most recent issue (Spring 1996, Issue #34) of Toon Reviews, Judith Reboy's comments on the CBC Master Control are for the most part true.

However, it is the BBS (Baton Broadcasting System) that airs the Disney programmes via the CTV Television Network and not the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). Baton owns several CTV affiliate stations including CFTO here in Toronto from where the Master Control is produced.

In general I enjoy your articles and reviews, but I was disappointed to find this kind of error. A little more research would have made a difference!

Why all those press releases?

Derek K. Carrow

Chapel Hill, NC

Enclosed is a check to renew my subscription, starting with issue #35. (I already have #34).

I think printing a collected set of issues 1-16 is a great idea and I would purchase a set. Also, if you need issues 8, 12, 15 or 16, I would be happy to send you mine.

Just one note of criticism on #34. The "Toon News" articles on *Jonny Quest*, *Mighty Ducks* and *Duck Daze* read like they were taken word-for-word from publicity kit "puff pieces." I don't like it when *Animation* does it (It was a major reason why I let my subscription lapse), and I don't care for **ANIMATO!** doing it, either.

The rest of the magazine was outstanding. I look forward to the *Thief and the Cobbler* article.

Well, those articles were indeed from press releases, but I thought the material was interesting enough to warrant its inclusion.
GMD

Continued on Page 62



TOON REVIEWS



by Andrew Osmond, Judith Reboy, Mark Lungo, and G. Michael Dobbs

Theatrical

The Hunchback of Notre Dame

The verdict from the critics is in...*The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is one of the "best" films of the summer, of 1996, of the century! While the film is not an embarrassment to the Disney legacy (which I have to admit was my prediction), it is by no means a successful film. Although beautifully animated and impressively designed, *Hunchback* continues the studio's effort to present more "mature" themes in its animated features. *Hunchback*, however, is a production at war with itself. The film's plot and themes strain against the restraints of a G rating at the same time a marketing effort tries to sell it as a traditional family film acceptable for children of all ages.

Let's put it this way: would a typical family with children ages four and up ever consider taking their children to a live-action version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, even it was rated G? I sincerely doubt it. The only reason parents are taking their kids is because this is a Disney cartoon, and the trouble is that *Hunchback* is not a cartoon for younger children.

I'm sure some families will walk out of the theater wondering just what the phrase "family film" truly means. Yes, older children may understand and appreciate this watered-down version of Victor Hugo's story of intolerance, sin, and redemption, but younger children will undoubtedly be bored or mystified by the film's themes and its reliance to use lengthy lyric-driven songs to present key plot points. The result is *Hunchback* isn't challenging enough for adults and too challenging for many children.

It's not necessary to compare this adaptation to Hugo's original in order to see the film's problems. The film's screenplay reduces Hugo's rich tapestry of medieval life in Paris to its barest bones. The only government figure in the film is Minister of Justice Frollo (we never learn why there is no other authority than him) and Frollo is waging genocide against the Gypsies (about whom we are told nothing other than they have somewhat darker skin).



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The one time Frollo relents against his hatred of the Gypsies is when he agrees to spare the life of a Gypsy baby who is born with numerous birth defects. The baby is hidden (and sheltered) in the bell towers of Notre Dame Cathedral. Twenty years pass and the youth, known as Quasimodo, is intelligent, friendly, and a talented craftsman, but thanks to the twisted teachings of Frollo is afraid to venture out of the cathedral.

The Disney approach to Quasimodo is to eliminate the more extreme elements of the original (gone are the hunchback's misshapen blind eye and deafness) and make the character more of a misunderstood child with a very bad foster parent.

During the annual Feast of Fools,

Quasimodo does leave the church (against Frollo's order) and is both celebrated and tortured by the crowd, only to be saved by the Gypsy dancer, the beautiful Esmeralda. Quasimodo's pure unrequited love of Esmeralda is mirrored by Frollo's lust for the beautiful dancer. Complicating matters is the handsome and just Captain of the Guards who also loves Esmeralda. Frollo's desire for Esmeralda and her rejection of him lead to the fiery conclusion of the film.

There are some interesting gaffes in the film. If Quasimodo is a Gypsy, then why doesn't he have a dark skin color? Why does Notre Dame Cathedral have huge vats of a boiling liquid all set to repel Frollo's troops? Why do the gargoyles come to life for Quasimodo?

The film lurches between the drama of the story and the comic relief provided by three stone gargoyles who come to life just for Quasimodo. Their gargoyles' gags are frequently anachronistic which also put a lopsided spin to the film

Hunchback takes the sledgehammer approach with the concept that looks don't mean anything and that true beauty and virtue have nothing to do with position or appearance. Over and over the film makes this point, and one realizes that without the complexity of themes of the original novel, there isn't a whole lot left. The company had already explored this theme in *Beauty and the Beast*.

That's not to say there aren't moments of genuine emotion in this film, because there are indeed. The problem is when you take material that is indeed adult and force it into a presentation marketed for children you are going to lose many of the qualities which made the original a "classic."

The move to make Frollo a government official, rather than preserve the character's original role as a man of the cloth, is one example of the changes made to defuse material which might seem objectionable to Disney's many critics.

No one can take anything away from the outstanding cel animation and clever use of computer generated images in the film's numerous crowd scenes, however if the company is going to continue trying to explore more "adult" themes, they should bite the bullet and go for a PG or PG-13 rating, and tell the marketing department to sell the film to its proper audience. **GMD**

All Dogs Go to Heaven 2 MGM

Did anyone really want a sequel to *All Dogs Go to Heaven*? The original Don Bluth film never seemed to have much of a following either among kids or adult animation fans. Still, it must have made money somewhere along the way, because now we have this Bluth-less theatrical follow-up, done with a mostly new creative team and voice cast.

As *All Dogs 2* begins, canine con man Charlie Barkins (Charlie Sheen) is in Dog Heaven, a place he has come to regard as boring and predictable. When Gabriel's horn, which is needed to open the Pearly Gates, falls through a portal to Earth and lands in San Francisco, Charlie persuades the prissy head angel Annabelle (Bebe Neuwirth) to send him to retrieve it, although his real reason for volunteering is that he wants to see Earth again. After Charlie and Itchy Itchington (Dom DeLuise), his best friend from the first film, arrive in the city by the bay, they team up with Sasha (Sheena Easton), a canine nightclub songstress whom Charlie falls in love with, and

David (Adam Wylie), a human runaway boy whom Sasha is protecting. Meanwhile, it turns out that Gabriel's horn has been stolen by Carface (Ernest Borgnine), the villainous gangster dog from the original movie, who made it to Dog Heaven by fooling everyone into thinking he'd reformed. In fact, Carface is working for Red (George Hearn), a feline demon who needs the horn to execute his fiendish plot against Dog Heaven. The fate of the entire realm rests in Charlie's paws—and Dog Heaven is doomed unless he sees through Red and Carface's trickery and overcomes his own irresponsibility.

There are two favorable things I can say about *All Dogs Go to Heaven 2*: 1. It isn't terrible. 2. Charlie Sheen is a better voice actor than Burt Reynolds, star of the original film, and the sequel's producers have the good sense not to let him sing his own songs. Otherwise *All Dogs 2* is an uninvolved film with mediocre animation (done by several studios around the world), a formulaic plot, no interesting characters, and no reason to exist other than to keep the franchise going (and possibly set up a rumored forthcoming TV series). The musical numbers, by veterans Barry Mann & Cynthia Weil, are far from their best work; the songs range from moderately enjoyable to embarrassingly trite.

It's an interesting coincidence that in the spring of 1996, two animated movies featuring dogs played in theaters, while a third was released on home video. *All Dogs 2* was (pardon the expression) the underdog in this competition, a status it richly deserved; both the excellent *Balto* and the flawed but entertaining *Oliver and Company* are superior films on every level. I've seen all three movies, but I can't recommend that anyone else take the time to do so. After all, as *All Dogs 2* reminds us, life is short. **Mark Lungo**

Oliver and Company Walt Disney Pictures

In 1988, the release of Disney's *Oliver and Company* was greeted with jeers from many corners, because, like *The Great Mouse Detective* a few years prior, it utilized computer effects. Admittedly, by today's standards, some of the imaging—especially when used to create things like cars—is a little crude, but mainly the film retains a traditional Disney look.

And without the CGI effects pioneered in *Oliver and Great Mouse*, we wouldn't have a carpet for *Aladdin*, the ballroom where *Beauty and the Beast* danced, or even the tall ship where Ariel fell in love with Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid*. Hopefully, this bit of 20/20 hindsight will allow people to watch *Oliver* in a less judgmental way, and appreciate it for what it is: a nice little movie.

About as faithful to Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* as the recent Demi Moore film was

to *The Scarlet Letter*, *Oliver and Company* is a great deal less frivolous than the live action musical *Oliver*! While the latter starts with a repulsive production number with starving children joyfully singing about food, the Disney film begins with a poignant opening sequence in which, along with his littermates, the kitten who would be Oliver is put up for sale on a street corner, mirroring his human literary counterpart.

Time passes, and one by one the other kittens are sold. As the touching theme song, *Once Upon a Time In New York City* comments on the action like a Greek chorus, Oliver, the leftover who couldn't even be given away, eventually faces an all too realistic fate. Alone and abandoned in a rain storm, he struggles to find shelter on the mean streets. (I've been accused of being a cynic, but after at least a half dozen viewings, I'm still reduced to tears by this sequence!)

Oliver's weary search for shelter illustrates a rather surprising element: The New York City that it presents is very real. Equal parts fairyland and Hell, its vision is one of towering buildings and constant movement, but its cityscape is cluttered with billboards and so grimy that viewers may have to fight the impulse to take a cloth to the movie screen. If you've ever been to New York City as a tourist, you'll recognize it.

Similarly, the characters been updated, but they still retain their rather gray morality. Fagin (voiced by Dom DeLuise) hasn't really changed much. He's still a questionable but quasi-lovable character who surrounds himself with a "family" of innocents (in this case his dogs) who steal for him. His "associate," Sykes (Robert Loggia), however, is much more than the homicidal bully of the novel. He's a mob-connected shipping magnate to whom Fagin owes money. It's particularly chilling to hear him describing the proper way to do an assassination as Fagin, who already fears for his life, and the dogs enter the room.

The canine Dodger (Billy Joel) is one of my least favorite types: the smart-aleck diamond in the rough that we're supposed to admire because of his attitude. Yes, he does eventually learn to love because of Oliver. But since there are several characters who learn the same lesson in a much shorter amount of screen time, I found Dodger somewhat disagreeable. When he and the gang "rescue" an unwilling Oliver from his happy adopted home, Dodger delivers a particularly nasty speech to the hapless kitty that just makes him seem obnoxious.

On the other hand, while cute fuzzy animals and small children are generally things to avoid in Disney films, here they are done brilliantly. Oliver (Joey Lawrence) engages audience sympathy not only by being adorable, but by being brave enough to fight for what is his, whether his opponent is Dodger, Sykes' dogs, or Sykes himself. While fate plays a large part in his life, he genuinely earns his happy ending.

Jenny Foxworth (Natalie Gregory/Myhanh Tran), the "poor little rich girl" who adopts Oliver after one of the gang's ill-fated robbery attempts, is remarkably free from the annoying stereotypes of most Disney kid characters. She's neither a "little adult" like the children in *Peter Pan* or the live action *Mary Poppins*, nor does she baby talk like the little girl in *The Rescuers*. While she is sweet and remarkably unaffected by her surroundings, she has far too much energy for her own good. In short, she's a regular, believable kid. She is also unique for Disney animated heroines in that she has two parents. It doesn't seem like much of an advantage, though. While we never actually meet them, they are portrayed as somewhat neglectful.

A new villain is added to the story in the form of Jenny's odious poodle, Georgette, hysterically voiced by Bette Midler. A canine version of Midler's *Divine Miss M.* persona, she livens up the proceedings with a wicked little song, *Perfect Isn't Easy*, which quickly establishes her character (or lack of same).

As funny as she is, I was glad to see her given some depth toward the ends of the film, when she has to become a part of the gang because her hatred of Oliver has dire consequences for Jenny.

Rita, the female member of Fagin's gang (Sheryl Lee Ralph/Ruth Pointer), is a far cry from the pathetic Nancy of the book. Independent to the last, she turns down an offer to live at Sykes' penthouse as mate to one of his Dobermans (Roscoe, voiced by Taurean Blaque). She's an equal to any of the guys, and knows it.

The other gang members, Tito (Cheech Marin), Francis (Roscoe Lee Browne) and Einstein (Richard Mulligan) serve to establish the multi-ethnic/cultural background of the New York City setting. My only gripe is that some of the characters, particularly Rita and dear Einstein, don't get enough screen time.

Some portions of the film are surprisingly intense for a G-rated film. When the bad guys finally get their comeuppance, it's even more graphic and frightening than Scar's demise in *The Lion King*. But one has to admire the film's honesty. In the end, it's clear that the surviving characters, with the well deserved exception of Oliver, will continue to live their lives much as they did when we first saw them. Social conscience does not win out, and there is no attempt to reform the gang members. They are what they are, and are happy about it.

This was the last Disney musical to be scored by committee, but this shouldn't be considered a bad thing. The diverse talents and musical styles involved only reinforce the movie's theme of New York as the "great melting pot." And frankly, this is probably one of the most diverse groups of artists ever assembled. Among them are Howard Ashman as co-author

of *Once Upon a Time In New York City*, Barry Manilow as co-author and producer of *Perfect Isn't Easy*, and Phil Ramone as producer of Dodger's theme song, *Why Should I Worry?*

One thing that does seem a little strange in retrospect is that despite their vocal talents, neither of the film's child voice artists sing at all. Even though his days as a teen idol were still years away, Joey Lawrence regularly sang on the sitcom *Gimme a Break*, and yet Oliver's thoughts are sung in the title sequence by Huey Lewis.

Natalie Gregory got rave reviews for both her singing and acting in Irwin Allen's musical version of *Alice In Wonderland* not long before *Oliver and Company*. Yet her song, *Good Company*, is performed by Myhanh Tran, who sounds just like her!

I don't know if Sheryl Lee Ralph can sing, and Ruth Pointer does a great job of preserving Rita's attitude in her songs. However, it is a little distracting when Ms. Pointer speaks some of Rita's dialogue during the *Streets of Gold* number because their speaking voices aren't the least bit similar.

These are minor points, however. On the whole *Oliver and Company* may not please Disney purists, but its refreshing lack of pretension — One wonders if the conservative Disney organization will dare to release it on video as part of their Masterpiece Collection — makes it a fun ride. It's a fair assumption that no matter how successful the re-release is, its freewheeling style won't be seen again soon.

Judith Reboy

Videotape

The Aristocats

Walt Disney Home Video

With all the critical attention on Disney these days, it's fashionable to discriminate between the studio's "great" and "not-so-great" films, and to slam the latter as tripe. The pictures of the late thirties and early forties have long been seen as constituting Disney's "golden age" — unsurprising, as the majority of the critical establishment grew up with them. More generally, the critics tend to admire those films which pushed back the boundaries of animation artistry: pictures like the overtly cartoony *Hundred and One Dalmatians* and the heavily stylised *Sleeping Beauty*. The "cut-price" features of the seventies and conventional pictures of the early eighties are shunned, consigned to the critical dustbin.

Which probably explains why *The Aristocats* tends to be overlooked in histories of the studio. To be fair, it doesn't have the best of pedigrees. For one thing, it was the first film released after Walt's death (he was involved only in pre-production) and consequently the studio was in no mood to take risks. The

borrowings are blatant: the notion of a hero from the wrong side of the tracks was lifted straight from *Lady and the Tramp*, while the abduction scenario had been used in *101 Dalmatians* only three films before. Most glaring of all was the influence of *The Jungle Book*, Walt's last film: not only was Phil (Baloo) Harris imported to play O'Malley, but the Shermans were brought in to give the film a "jazzy" feel, despite the setting of 1910 Paris! In addition to this, the animation is a clear step down from the standards of the sixties. The backgrounds, with the exception of a few country landscapes in the middle scenes, are shallow and lackluster, with only character animation continuing to maintain a high standard.

The film's story is also open to criticism. In a contemporary review, *Variety* described *Aristocats* as "a series of well-plotted vignettes, bracketed by establishing sequences which suggest but don't deliver a sturdy plot line," and that's very much how the film is. The "meat" of the film is supposed to be the cats' journey back to their mistress, but the story is constantly detracted by comic set-pieces like the two stray dogs and the *Everybody Wants to be a Cat* song (good though it may be). As with many weak scripts, the support is left with precious little to do. Promising characters like the Geese (voiced by British actresses Carole Shelley and Monica Evans), their "marinated" Uncle Waldo, the scat cats, and the rodent Roquefort (voiced by Disney regular Sterling Holloway) are all wasted.

So what are the film's saving graces? Basically, its parts add up to more than the whole: while *Aristocats* may fail in the last analysis, it's fun to watch and much more enjoyable than some of the studio's more ambitious ventures (*Sleeping Beauty*, for example, or *Alice in Wonderland*). The film's main asset lies in its strong vocal leads, Phil Harris and Eva Gabor, playing O'Malley and Duchess respectively. Critics often accuse the actors of copying two other Disney stalwarts, Baloo (voiced by Harris in *The Jungle Book*) and Bianca (voiced by Gabor in *The Rescuers*) but the claim does not stand up to inspection. O'Malley is considerably more streetwise and refined than "jungle bum" Baloo — one could hardly imagine Baloo seducing a female bear! — while Duchess is less reckless and more responsible than Bianca in *The Rescuers*. Of course, the latter point stems from Duchess' position as a mother safeguarding her children, and the scenes depicting the family together are charmingly handled.

The relationship between Duchess and O'Malley is portrayed very thoughtfully: on the one hand it's obvious Duchess *likes* O'Malley, but she's clearly smart enough to let her head rule her heart and realize the consequences of a long term relationship. (This theme, surprisingly adult for a Disney film, contrasts with Lady's

behavior in *Lady and the Tramp*.) In addition, it's refreshing to see a Disney heroine not accepting the lead at face-value, an idea not used again until *Beauty and the Beast*. For example, after O'Malley has spent five minutes trying to verbally seduce Duchess with talk of travel on his "magic carpet," he is confounded by the appearance of Duchess' children: Duchess rubs salt in the wound by gently inquiring "No poetry to cover the situation, Mr. O'Malley?" Clearly Duchess, while not the best-rounded of the Disney characters, was drawn with some respect for female independence.

The other major characters are well-handled. Edgar, though perhaps too comic to qualify as a true "Disney" villain, is an excellent caricature, stealing much of the film's knockabout humour. Duchess' kittens are well-voiced and characterised, and their nicely observed antagonism makes a change from the sanitized moppets of most cartoons. The score, though not ranking among Disney's best, is catchy and likeable, though only Chevalier's title song is really appropriate to the setting.

All in all, *The Aristocats* is a good film. Okay, it doesn't stand among the studio greats, but it's competent enough, achieves its (rather modest) aims, and is streets ahead of the output from most rival Western animators, many of which lack either story or characters. I think one can forget that, while a film may not be a classic, or even entirely satisfactory, it may still be a damn sight better than most others in its field. *The Aristocats* strikes me as one such film.

Andrew Osmond

Flesh Gordon

New Market Sales Home Video



In 1974, x-rated film producers Bill Osco and Howard Ziehm decided to make a porno parody film of the beloved science fiction adventure comic strip *Flash Gordon*. Although originally intended as a hard-core explicit film, the producers realized that if they were going to make back their money on the increasingly elaborate production, they would have to cut out any explicit sex in order to make the film acceptable for a wider audience that would normally go to a X-rated production.

Although it was indeed rated X, *Flesh Gordon* was considered just a step above a R-rated film. A sexual burlesque of Alex Raymond's characters, the film is clever and entertaining in a decidedly non-politically correct way.

Of particular interest in animation fans is the film's several stop motion sequences. Flesh and his friends find themselves facing three different stop-motion monsters, at least one of which, (the metallic "beetleman") was animated by Jim Danforth under a pseudonym.

Soon after the X-rated release, the distributor of the film edited the production to meet the MPPA's requirements for a "R" rating in order to get wider distribution. The distributor went out-of-business when the company was seized as part of an organized crime indictment.

Needless to say the film *Flesh Gordon* was lost in the shuffle. The movie made its video debut on the now-defunct Media label, and subsequently has been on numerous public domain labels. Although the print used on the Media releases carries a MPPA X rating card, the tape's box carries an R designation. The rumor that went around film circles were two-fold: that the original X-rated version no longer existed as all the prints were cut for the R rating; and that somewhere there were hard-core scenes that were filmed but were discarded.

This new "restored" version of *Flesh Gordon* boasts of 10 extra minutes of footage that was not in the original X-rated release. While the tape has many assets (it's letterboxed, includes the original trailer, and is the sharpest, cleanest print of the film I've seen on video), the extra footage claim is misleading.

There is indeed extra footage of Flesh in the good witch's swan space ship. The footage shows a dwarf monster assistant walking around the ship, more screen time of the witch and Flesh making love, and more cel animation of the constellations. The footage neither adds nor detracts to the meaning or humor of the film.

The second additional boost in footage comes when Prince Precious' ladybug ship is about to crash into the mouth-like gate of Wang's castle. It's a cliffhanger moment, and the film makers treated like a serial chapter with a series of narrative cards

hyping whether or not Flesh and his friends would survive. After the cards, there is an intermission of several minutes duration! Considering the running time of the film (less than two hours) and the intended audience, an intermission is a device that just doesn't work. It is little wonder why this was removed from the original release print.

The third addition is a few added scenes with the Harryhausen-like animated monster at the climax of the film. Interestingly enough, *Entertainment Weekly* revealed that the star of the ABC sitcom *Coach*, Craig T. Nelson, provided the voice for the monster.

All in all, this is the version of *Flesh Gordon* you should buy. **GMD**

Pocahontas

New Market Sales Home Video

And I thought the *Gumby Movie* was bad! This has to be the most inept stop-motion production I've seen in years. This re-telling of the story of Pocahontas is supposed to be both respectful and humorous all at the same time, but winds up being a crude insult to Native Americans. Directed and written by John Matthews, this half-hour direct-to-video production strives to cloud the historical record and trivialize the clash between the native and European cultures. The model designs are hideous and the animation is barely adequate. To pad out the running time, the tape's packagers stuck some *Power Ranger* public service announcements at the end of the show. Kids would be better served by watching a blank tv screen. **GMD**

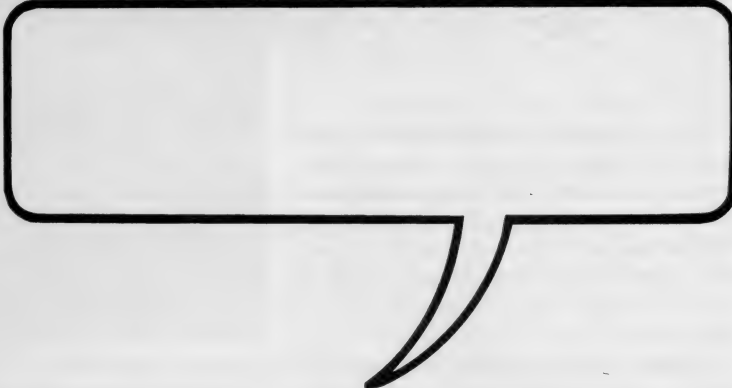
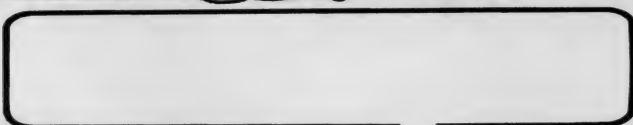
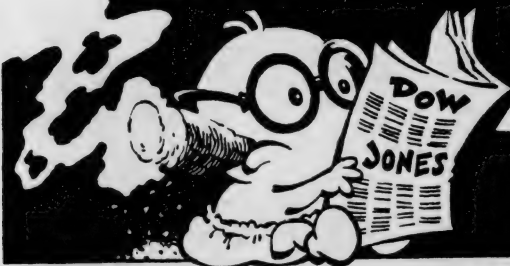
Sextoons

New Market Sales Home Video

When I saw this tape offered by New Market Sales, I was curious if this was the same compilation tape that was marketed several years ago. It is, and if you're looking for adult entertainment, pass this one up. The shorts are primarily student productions in which sexual themes or naughty body parts are on display. Ho hum. The quality of the animation varies substantially, and there are not one but two films based on the Holy Modal Rounders' song *Do You Like Boobs Alot?* Avoid this one like the plague. **GMD**



YOUNG READERS' PAGE!



Young Reader's Caption Contest: Here's the deal. Write captions for any one or all of the cartoons on this page. We'll publish our favorites in a future issue of Animato! Photocopy this page so you won't have to shred your magazine. Published entries will receive a special Animato! Grab Bag of Animation Goodies. No limit on number of entries.

Name: _____ Age: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Send To: Animato! Captions, 17 Spruce Street, Springfield, MA 01105

ANIMATO! 9



Surfin' The Web

by Gene Gumbs

It seems like you can't go anywhere these days without hearing about the internet. I think everyone this side of Mars has an email address (come to think of it, I think even Marvin the Martian has one!). The "net", as the initiated call it, is so vast that you could make exploring it a full-time job for the rest of your life, and never see it all!

Perhaps the greatest allure of the internet, though, is the World Wide Web. Numerous companies publish their Web address in their print and electronic advertising.

I thought it was time that ANIMATO! took a look around the Web to see what

will probably be better served (and take a lighter hit in the wallet) if you get an independent service provider (ISP). I use national server, NetCom (1-800-Netcom1). It currently costs \$19.95/month for unlimited access. Check your local phone book and newspaper for local companies that might have a better deal.

You will also need navigation software. All the on-line services will provide one, and many of the ISPs will, as well. I use Netscape 2.0, and can't say enough good things about it.

Once you're on the net, you'll need to know how to find all the places you want to visit. There are several search engines available. The two I am most familiar with are WebCrawler

closest I ever came to surfing was watching Annette Funicello in *Beach Blanket Bingo* on Sunday afternoon. Fortunately, when surfing the net, there's no water, boards, or blankets, and none of that annoying sand in your shorts!

My completely subjective rating system works like this:

- ★★★★★ A gem. Great to look at with excellent content.
- ★★★★ - An excellent site.
- ★★★ - A good site.
- ★★ - Fair. Needs some work to get into the upper echelon.
- ★ - Not worth your time

So, without further ado, turn on the Beach Boys' CD and let's go Surfin' Internet Style!

Plymptoons

(<http://found.cs.nyu.edu/plympton>)

This is the home of animator Bill Plympton, perhaps best known for his critically acclaimed *The Tune* and his work that has turned up on MTV. This site is the perfect place to learn more about what he's done, and what he's doing now.

The opening page is full of original Plympton artwork, and is well organized. The page has art "buttons" that take you to other places within the site, where you read a Plympton bio, check on his personal appearance schedule, and see a list of film festivals featuring Plympton's animation.

The best part about this site, though, is getting a feel for what Plympton's work is all about. There is a synopsis of *The Tune*, and one of his upcoming feature film, *I Married a Strange Person*. There is also a brief piece about each of his animated shorts.

You can also visit the "Plympmart," where he has a video compilation of his short subjects, and a documentary made a few years ago about Plympton. There is also a chance to buy autographed cels or drawings from his work. There is a printable order form that you can mail in, so you don't have to give your credit card number on-line - that still makes me nervous, even with a secure browser like Netscape.

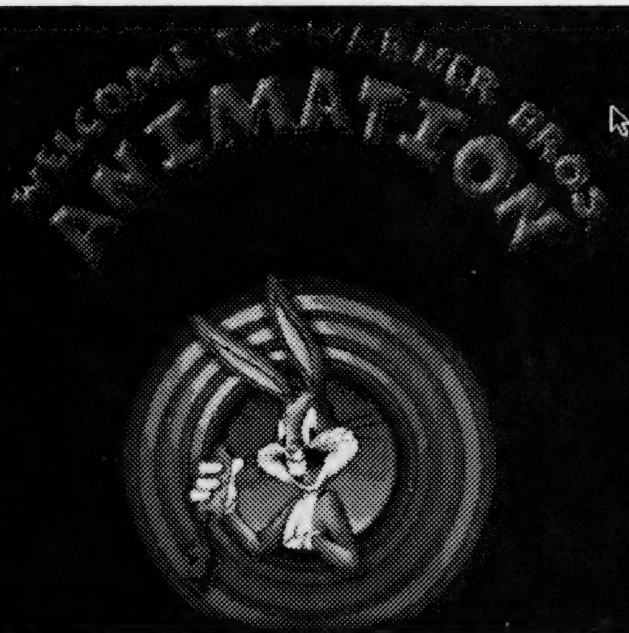
Rating: This ain't mainstream animation here, so that makes it all the more interesting to

animation-related sites were there, and tell you what was worth a visit. Almost as soon as I came up with the idea, I began to realize what a Herculean task it might become. There are literally thousands of sites in existence right now, with new pages being added daily.

So, what do you need to surf the net? Beside the obvious - a computer - you need a modem (minimum 14400 baud, but 28800 is better), and an internet service provider. All the on-line services have internet access, but you

(www.webcrawler.com) and Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com). Your internet provider may be able to steer you to others. Once you get the search engine, simply type in some key words (i.e. animation, cartoons, etc.) and it will generate a list of sites that match your keys.

I decided that each issue I'd review four or five sites, including content, graphics, libraries, links, and overall presentation. Of course, the only way to do this was to spend some time "surfing" to some up with the candidates. The



me. If you're already a Plympton fan, you might not find much new, but it'll be fun to poke around. 

Unofficial Pink Panther Page (<http://www.high-tech.com/panther>)

This page bills itself as a "Shrine to the Pink Panther." There was a time when this little 'toon was on all over the dial. Now it's very difficult, if not impossible, to find. Now, I've always been a fan of the Pink Panther cartoons, so I perhaps have a built-in bias when I write this review. Keeping that in mind, I found this site very entertaining and full of information.

The opening page is a little drab, but one cool feature is a picture of the Panther with eyes that blink. The menu of the page will direct you to a pretty good history of the Pink Panther and animator Friz Freleng, outlining the rather harmless beginning as the opening credits for Blake Edward's film *The Pink Panther*, starring the late Peter Sellers. Turns out the opening got better reviews than the film! There's also a bio of the legendary Freleng, who passed away last year.

Also included in the site is a list of books and videos about the Panther. I was pleasantly surprised to see the number of Panther cartoons available on video. One really cool feature, is a list of every Panther installment, including full credits! I culled through that for a while to see how many I actually remembered.

There's a library of Panther images also available for download, and even a list of Peter Sellers' films. I'm not sure why, but this site also includes some photos from a Pink Panther museum done by someone named Julie Tapia. I don't know whether this is a real museum, or just someone obsessed with collecting Pink

Panther memorabilia. If it's the former, they should let folks know where it is. If it's the latter, I worry about his girl and her checkbook.

There are links to six related Panther sites, including some art galleries selling Panther items. There is also a link to a game company called Wanderlust that is developing a Pink Panther game on CD ROM that looks kinda cool.

Rating: This site is chuck full of good info and neat images. If you're a Panther fan you're gonna love this. If you're too young to remember much about the cartoon, this will be an excellent introduction. 

Warner Brothers Animation (<http://www.wbanimation.com>)

This site has some of the best graphics of any other I've seen. The opening page is a revolving circle that alternated between Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. Because of the intense graphics, the site can be a little slow at times, but it's worth the wait!

In the games gallery, you can download games, or play them online. Some of them require special extensions to your web browser that are available for free download, and this site will point you in the right direction. There are connect the dots games, and even coloring books that you do online with a color palette. The kids will like this!

Warner Bros. also uses this area for special announcements and programming notes. For instance, there is a section detailing the new Superman cartoon scheduled for the WB in September. There is also a section on all the current WB kids shows.

The crowning jewel of this site is something they call "Animation 101." This feature is a

series of about 50 pictures detailing the animation process from beginning to end, from storyline to storyboards to filming. It's a really cool presentation!

There are links included to six other animation sites that are all Warner Brothers related.

Rating: Overall this is a superior site with stunning graphics. My only negative comment is that I wish they had included some stuff on the history of Warner Brothers animation. Perhaps something on Chuck Jones and some of the others that pioneered some of the best-known cartoons ever made. However, that omission still doesn't take away from the fact that they've done an excellent job here. 

Vintage Ink and Paint (<http://www.vintageip.com>)

Vintage Ink and Paint is an art gallery that deals in collectible cels and original art from some of the best-known animators and cartoons. One whole section of the web site is dedicated to Ralph Bakshi. Perhaps best recognized from his early projects, *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Metal*, there is a good size biography of Ralph, and a complete filmography from *Mighty Mouse: The New Adventures* that Ralph worked on.

The gallery is selling cels from *Mighty Mouse* that are autographed by Ralph. In fact, they show seven of them to you! No word on how much they cost, but there is ordering information and a phone number you can call for more info.

Other sections of this site are used to showcase other collectibles that Vintage Ink and Paint has for sale, but one part that almost escaped my attention proved to be a little gem. I'm not an animation art collector. It's just not something that ever interested me, but I got a good education about the field by reading the animation art glossary that's included on the site. It's pretty thorough and informative.

Rating: If you're interested in collecting animation art, this is a good site to visit. You get a good look at some of the art for sale, and a bit about the folks behind the work. If you're not really into this, it's worth a visit just to check out the glossary.  

Gene Gumbs' byline may be new to ANIMATO! readers, but he has been involved with the magazine since Issue 24 as our fearless lay-out guy. A Connecticut native, computer guru, and sports maven (he does television color commentating for the Springfield (MA) Falcons and radio broadcasts for the Norwich (CT) Navigators), Gene will be our regular cyber-reporter and surfing the animation websites.



Virgil Ross Passes

Legendary animator Virgil Ross, who worked on many of Warner Brothers most memorable classic cartoons and achieved professional distinction as a gifted Personality Animator, died at home in Los Angeles, Wednesday, May 15, 1996. He was 88 years old.

Among the many cartoons that Ross worked on are Bugs Bunny's first Academy Award winning animated short *A Wild Hare*, and four other Oscar-winners, *Tweety Pie*, *Speedy Gonzales*, *Birds Anonymous* and *Knighty Knight Bugs*.

Ross developed an interest in drawing through a high school cartooning class. After graduating high school in 1926, he obtained a job drawing title cards for silent movies, then found an animation job as an "in-betweener" at the Winkler/Mintz Studio. Within a few years he had become a full-fledged animator and was drawing Oswald the Rabbit for Walter Lantz. At this time he met Tex Avery, a leading animation director, who became Ross' mentor. When Avery left Walter Lantz to join Warner Brothers in 1935, he brought Virgil Ross with him.

In 1940, Avery and Ross collaborated on the Oscar-nominated *A Wild Hare*. In 1942, Ross moved to Friz Freleng's animation unit at Warner Bros. and went on to create more than 230 of the studio's most memorable cartoons, four of which received Academy Awards. Ross was known for his gift in animating expressions on his characters; he was considered among the world's finest in that specialized art.

In 1964, Ross joined Filmation Studios, working on characters such as *Archie*, *Fat Albert*, *Batman*, *Superman* and the *Groovie Goolies*. In the sixties and seventies, he worked on cartoons for Hanna-Barbera including *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons* and *Smurfs*. He worked with Ralph Bakshi on Format Film's *Lone Ranger*. In the eighties he worked on television cartoon specials created by Chuck Jones and Friz Freleng. In 1992, he returned to Warner Bros. to develop a series of limited edition animation cels, and from that time until late 1995, Ross traveled around the country visiting animation art galleries and speaking about the early days of animation.

Ross preserved over 2000 historical, sequential, animation scenes from his favorite Warner Brothers cartoons and donated them to the Warner Brothers Historical Foundation for the enjoyment of future generations.

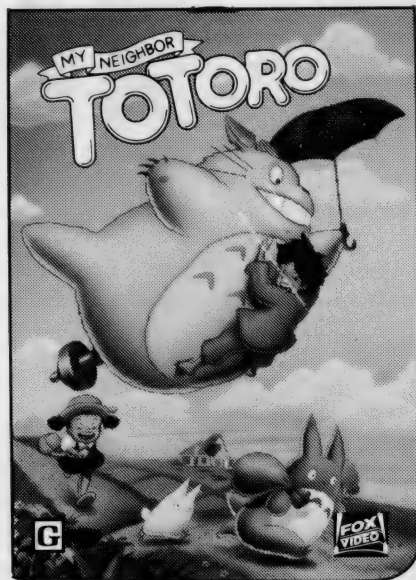
Ross is survived by his wife Frances, his sister-in-law Marianne Ross and his niece, Roxana Ross and her family. Funeral services were be private. **Provided by The Sunday Funnies**



One of the many limited edition cels created by the late Virgil Ross.
(© Warner Bros.)

Disney to Distribute Miyazaki's Animated Movies in U.S.

[from Japan Economic Newswire, JULY 17, 1996]



With the Disney name and marketing clout behind Miyazaki's films, the video success of *My Neighbor Totoro* should be surpassed. (© Nibariki-Tokuma Shoten)

Walt Disney Co. has agreed with a Japanese publisher to distribute English-language versions of the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki through its global network, officials of the publisher, Tokuma Shoten Publishing Co., said Wednesday.

Miyazaki's animated movie, *My Neighbor Totoro* has been translated into English and the film is also available on videotape. Some of the animator's better-known movies include *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Laputa, Castle in the Sky*.

The Tokyo-based publishing house has the right to market Miyazaki's works and it holds a majority equity stake in his company, Studio Ghibli Co.

Walt Disney will distribute the English versions of Miyazaki's animated movies in the United States, Tokuma officials said.

A Japanese subsidiary of Walt Disney will market Miyazaki's animated movies on videotape in Japan and other countries, and Tokuma will focus on the distribution of his animated movies in Japan, they said.

Miyazaki has long wished to have his movies seen by children around the world, they added. **via the internet**

Eekstravaganza Update

A new cast of characters were added to Savage Steve Holland's *Eekstravaganza* this season. *Klutter*, a segment about the misadventures of a pile of junk brought to life

by static electricity and the kids who own the junk, was added to the show in the 1995-96 season.

Fans may have noticed that it looks to have as much in common with *The Critic* than *Eek! The Cat* or *The Terrible Thunderlizards*. According to creator/executive producer/writer Savage Steve Holland, that's no coincidence. The show is a collaboration between Film Roman. "When *The Critic* was canceled, I inherited every single crew member for *Klutter*, including the director, Brian Sheesley. Hence any similarity. The one extra Film Roman person is, of course, David Silverman of *The Simpsons* who's really a big part of the show. As a matter of fact, I've left most of the design, timing, boarding, etc. to David and Brian, and I couldn't be happier with the results."

While the animation style may be Film Roman, the scripts and characters are pure Savage Steve Holland, a perfect mixture of madness and sweetness. There's Mr. and Mrs. Heap, the loving but clueless parents of *Klutter*'s owners. Dad is a newspaper reporter who constantly bemoans that he lives in the most boring town in the world...while an explosion, a flock of escaped zoo animals, a car crash and an alien invasion surround him. Then there's that sign on the road construction site that reads, "Your tax dollars annoying you."

Klutter himself is a MacGuffin. The real stars of the show are the kids, who blessedly talk and act like real kids. Ryan, the oldest, whose hair color changes every other episode like Dobie Gillis, earnestly tries to be a reporter like his dad. Fortunately, he's much too innocent to see that when Dad only gives him his newspaper's "dead files" in an attempt to get rid of him. Naturally, these wild, tabloid type stories inevitably turn out to be true, but also naturally, the kids can't convince anybody that they are. Quiet middle kid Wade speaks with the bluntly honest deadpan tones that only a small child can use.

Their preschool age sister Sandee sometimes feels isolated by being the youngest and the only girl. Before *Klutter* comes into their lives, the poor kid, unable to find anyone to play with, tries to pull herself in her little red wagon, dejectedly saying, "Whee." Next door neighbor Vanna is bright, a little bossy, and usually exasperated when things go awry because the other kids failed to heed her advice.

The early episodes deal primarily with the kids' attempts to take *Klutter* along on outings without the grown ups, particularly Dad, who would probably develop an allergy to *Klutter* by virtue of the fact that he can be classified as a pet. Later segments have gone on somewhat stranger tangents, which Holland describes as "Scooby Doo-esque mystery elements."

However, unlike Scooby Doo and his pals, if *Klutter* and the Heap kids find a ghost or an alien, or an angry brain sucking mutant potato

creature, they won't find out later that it's really some guy in a suit trying to scare them. It's really a ghost, alien or killer spud.

One name that would not be associated with *Klutter*, at least on the creative end, is Savage's longtime friend and collaborator, Bill Kopp. At the time that *Klutter* began production, Kopp had an exclusive contract with Disney to create, write and produce *The Shnookums and Meat Funny Cartoon Show*.

It seems almost unbelievable, since Kopp had been such an integral part of the show's other two segments. He is co-creator of both *Eek! The Cat* and *The Terrible Thunderlizards*, as well as supervising producer on the early shows, and the voice artist behind several major characters, including Eek himself.

Fortunately for all concerned, the prospect was just as inconceivable to Holland and Silverman. (Kopp, Silverman and Tim Berglund, director of *Twisted Tales of Felix the Cat* provided the animated segments for Holland's live action feature, *One Crazy Summer*.) So they decided that if Kopp could not participate as animator or voice artist, they would include him as a character.

"When David Silverman, myself and any of our friends get together, we spend most of our time talking about, laughing at, and drawing Bill Kopp behind his back," cracks Holland. "We spend so much time doing this we figured we might as well make 'Kopp' a cartoon character that highlights the real Bill Kopp's motto for life, 'Get those women and children out of the way! I have to live!'"

The animated Kopp is a pre-adolescent pal of the Heap kids. Not to imply that the real Kopp's image takes its usual beating at his pal's hands, but in the first eight episodes, he's been forced to surf across the Heaps' front lawn (in drag), gnawed upon by giant slugs in a tank at the aquarium, and kidnapped by a mad scientist with intent to experiment, to name just a few dilemmas.

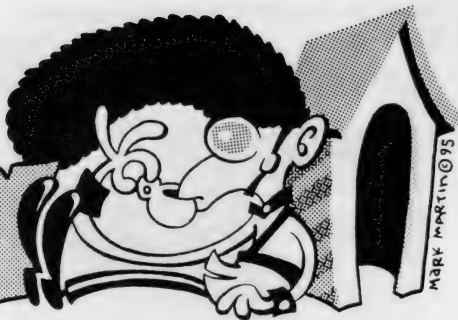
He's portrayed as (ahem) not terribly bright. In the pilot, he tries to sell lemonade at a roadside stand for \$100 a glass so that he only has to sell one to turn over a tidy profit.

The real life Bill Kopp has had a reversal of fortunes since his somewhat downbeat interview in **ANIMATO! #33**. As he predicted at that time, *Shnookums and Meat* was not picked up for a second season by Disney, and was taken out of rotation on *The Disney Afternoon*.

But happily, he recently signed a deal with Fox, according to Holland. This prompts yet another typical Savage Steve response, "They're threatening to put him right next to me. I have no idea what he's doing here but I am very afraid." He'll also continue to do voices for the *Eek* and

Continued on Page 61

Tons of Tea



By Andrew Osmond

Andrew presents a bumper round-up of independent films and animation revivals across the pond.

"If you go to any major animation festival, Britain is seen as the place where the highest quality work is going on."

Colin Rose, Executive Producer of animation at BBC.

What goes around comes around. As a young couch-potato I remember watching BBC celebrities read extracts from homegrown kid's books like *The Sheep-Pig* (better known as *Babe*) and *The Indian in the Cupboard*, both of which have since undergone the animatronics/six treatment in Hollywood. Circa 1981, another batch of celebs got together for a TV Xmas special based on *James and the Giant Peach*. The film featured Bernard Cribbins and ex-Goodie Bill Oddie, some bad songs and CSO, and a few primitive animated visuals (like Terry Gilliam's but not nearly as funny).

Hopefully Henry Selick's movie will erase such memories, as well as introducing new viewers to the incomparable Joanna Lumley, one of James' wicked aunts. Lumley's most recent role was as an outrageously hedonistic hippie in the cult sit-com *Absolutely Fabulous* (allegedly Roseanne Barr wanted to make a US version, but the network decided promiscuity, substance abuse and dysfunctionality weren't quite prime-time). Lumley's other credits include Purdey in *The New Avengers* and Sapphire in *Sapphire and Steel*, the greatest fantasy series no one remembers. Also, look out for supervising animator Paul Berry in the credits, late of *Nightmare Before Christmas*, and Britain's Cosgrove-Hall. Leading me neatly on to...

Cosgrove-Hall, currently engaged in a quite awe-inspiring range of projects. These include working with Oscar-winner Chuck Jones on his \$3.5 million *Peter and the Wolf* for ABC USA (22,000 drawings in seven months, thanks to the Cambridge Animo system); producing *Fantomcat*, about a swashbuckling feline voiced by ex-Messiah Robert Powell; and working on tot's model series *Noddie and Oakie Doakie*. Want something bigger? What about a 1997

version of *Discworld*, based on the classic comic-fantasy novels by Terry Pratchett? Readers of my *Truckers* review may recall how highly I regarded this previous Pratchett/C-H collaboration, so now's the time to harrass your channel bosses. Just to whet your appetites, *Discworld* boasts 3D computer animation as well as top-notch model figures, while the main character Death (presented in *Seventh Seal*/Woody Allen mode) is voiced by Hammer star Christopher Lee. The worldwide distributor is ITEL.

Back in **ANIMATO!** #29, I mentioned the success of the often sublime *Animated Shakespeare* series, co-produced by the Welsh Channel 54C and the Russian-based Christmas films (then, more Shakespeares have emerged: *Richard III* (painting on glass), *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale* (puppet animation), *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* (cel animation). All the films were half an hour, abridged by renowned Shakespeare scholar Leon Garfield.

Late 1994 saw the launch of the new *Operavox* collaborations, again initiated by 54C and including a greater range of players, including the up-and-coming UK animators l'izazz Pictures (makers of the Oscar-nominated *Village*) and Hibbert Ralph Entertainment. Titles to date: Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (not with Bugs Bunny), a nightmarish *Rigoletto* (Verdi), a Chinese-styled *Turandot* (Puccini), Wagner's *Rhinegold* and Bizet's *Carmen*. Of these, *Carmen* drew the most comment: it used footage of live actors, recoloured it by computer and transferred it to film, producing a unique half-way house between live-action and animated painting. Autumn 1995 saw the first installments of a third 54C venture, *The Old Testament - The Animated Version*. Readers may recognise one of the writer names: Brian Sibley, co-author of the comprehensive *Disney Studio Story*. Upcoming projects include versions of Chaucer, Pushkin, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (!) and *Don Quixote*.

54C's (and its English counterpart Channel 4's) ongoing commitment to animation continues to benefit independent studios who might otherwise fade into obscurity. At the time of writing, the series *Four-Mations* has returned, an excellent opportunity for old (and new) faces to display their wares on national TV. The first two shorts were stunning. Paul Vester's short *Abductees* was an investigation into close encounters of the third kind, with recordings of abduction accounts under hypnosis overlaid on an eclectic mix of animation styles and images (chalk, line drawings, colour cels), ranging from the whimsical to the disturbing. Fox Mulder would have loved it.

Barry Purves, responsible for such literary animations as *Next* and *Achilles*, presented the equally good *Screen Play*, a post-modern exercise in portraying an elaborately "stagey" cartoon. The Japanese tragedy was played out on an endlessly metamorphosing stage set, with turntables and rotating screens giving the short the feel of an intricate puzzle. It's impossible to describe adequately - suffice to say the delicate model work is exquisite, the ideas never stop coming, and the end is totally unexpected. Playing with theatrical illusions seems to be an increasing trend; Svankmajer's *Faust* (see last issue) traded on its "play in a play" structure, as does the puppet *Barber of Seville*, which opens with a ballet of stage-hands erecting opera scenery.

Other new independent animations include *Triangle*, the latest figurative/abstract offering from Erica Russell, and the more humorous *Sound of Music*, a scatological satire by Phil Mulloy. Another veteran of the independent scene is Candy Guard, who made feminist comedies like *Girl's Night Out* with Joanna Quinn: she continues the tradition with a series of (very) short cameo pieces under the name *Lil Films*. This year's British Animation Awards saw a trio of student films worth looking out for: the line-drawn *Wooden Leg* by Darren Doherty and Nick Smith, the paranoid *Mr. Jessop* by Brian Wood and the totally surreal *Hilary* by

Anthony Hodgson. On a more digital level, there's Simon Pummell's experimental Gothic mystery *Butcher's Hook* and Philip Hunt's *Ah Pook in Here*.

Not forgetting the latest offering from the avant-garde Brothers Quay, which has the hefty title *Institute Benjaminita, or This Dream Which People Call Human Life*. It's live-action (for once), but has all the hallmarks of their nightmare animations, with minute camera moves, images dominating dialogue and impassive actors who might as well be puppets. The Quays' production company, Konninck, supported many of Jan Svankmajer's Czech features in the Eighties, teaming up with BBC Bristol to co-produce *Faust*. Appropriately, several arthouses are running Svankmajer's work alongside the Quays', leading to abstruse double bills of, say Svankmajer's *Death of Stalinism in Bohemia* (another BBC co-production) and the Quays' *Street of Crocodile*. Having caught one of these perplexing (infuriating?) screenings, I can testify it's often hard to tell the difference.

By the time you read this, some of the above will have been represented at Cardiff's International Animation Festival. This also features the British premiere of *James and the Giant Peach*, a talk by Hollywood digital sfx maestro Scott Ross and the introduction of *All Time Animated Favourites*, a screening of selected animations chosen by an international jury. The winners include *Snow White* (Disney), *Fantasia*, *The Wrong Trousers*, *Gertie The Dinosaur*, *Duck Amuck* and John Lasseter's *Knick Knack*. Further items include a presentation by Klasky Csupo, the studio behind *Rugrats* and *The Simpsons*, and features ranging from the Welsh classic *Yellow Submarine* through to *Ghost in the Shell*.

Meanwhile, the familiar Aardman Animations Studio continues - almost inevitably - to go to new strengths. The 90-minute theatrical collection of Aardman's work (mentioned in Issue #30) has been sold to France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland and Norway. Nick Park, who won an Original Craft Award at the recent BAFTAs (British Oscars) is in touch with both Disney and Dreamworks, and is also developing a feature for Indie Producer Jake Eberts. He vows to stay in Britain, though, and downplays new developments like *Toy Story*: "It's easy to have a panic attack, but I find it nice to be hands-on with models, and computers aren't quite at that stage of having such control over detailed character expressions."

Indeed, there seems to be a welcome trend in educating people about animation's long-term heritage, rather than just its newest innovations. *Toy Story*'s release coincided with a National Film Theatre retrospective on the Fleischer Studios, where the presenter took pains to point out Pixar probably owed more to the '3D' block-out sets in, say, *Popeye Meets*

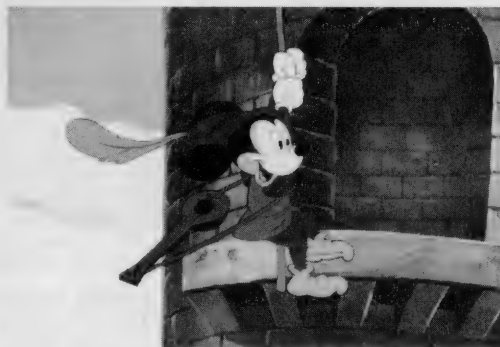
Ali Baba. . . or the Colour Classic *Play Safe!*, than to any comparable Disney. The invaluable BBC series *Stay Tooned*, hosted by Tony Robinson ("Baldrick" of the *Blackadder* series), screened Lasseter's incomplete *Where the Wild Things Are*..., while other recent episodes of the series included in-depth looks at Friz Freleng, more Australian toons and Louis de Rochemont's *Animal Farm*. If ever a kid's series cried out for export...

Other London retrospectives in recent months included one on Ray Harryhausen - who claimed that his Forties *Mother Goose* animations are still being screened - and a programme of early British animation. The latter included *The Jealous Doll*, a 1910 trick film, along with a newly-discovered Chaplin toon and a curious 1949 featurette called *Canterbury Tales*, produced by the short-lived G-B unit under Disney animator Brian O'Hanlon. The feature starts in fine surreal mode, a la Chuck Jones, then trails off completely. Highlight of the evening, though,

was the Anglo-Dutch puppet film *Love on the Range* (1937), directed by the great George Pal and was as charming as ever.

Another puppet film has figured among the more unexpected animation revivals in recent years: *Le Roman de Reynard* (aka *Tale of the Fox*), a 65-minute French-made feature from 1931 by director Wladyslaw Starewicz, who's a legend among classic animation fans. The Pal-esque film, which tells a fable about how a fox bamboozles the animal kingdom, took eighteen months to shoot, boasted 273,000 puppet arrangements and, in the words of one awed reviewer, was "an achievement on the level of staging *Ben Hur* in a show box."

Elsewhere, there were theatrical outings for Tim Burton's stop-motion tribute to Vincent Price, *Vincent* (attached to *Nightmare* screenings) while a *No More Hiroshimas* festival hosted screenings of the animes *Nausicaa* (uncut) and *Tombstone for Fireflies*, alongside some of the jingoistic Bugs Bunny 'toons of the 'forties.



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08

Are You Pondering What I'm Pondering? Yesss!

Maurice LaMarche helps make Pinky and The Brain a hit

by G. Michael Dobbs

The moment I became an Animaniacs fan is when I saw the Pinky and The Brain cartoon in which the world's smartest lab mouse is trying to record a series of narrations for a series of tv commercials. I realized immediately that this was almost a word-for-word adaptation of a tape of actual outtakes from an unsuccessful recording session with the late great Orson Welles. While the cartoon as a whole was brilliant, I couldn't get over the great vocal characterizations, especially the Wellesian tones of The Brain. Who was that voice actor?

Little did I realize then I had been hearing that actor's work all over the television dial. He was Egon Spengler on *The Real Ghostbusters*, Mr. Wilson on *Dennis The Menace*, Dishonest John on *The New Adventures of Beany and Cecil*, Popeye on *Popeye & Son*, dozens of different voices on *The Critic*, and had roles on shows such as *Duckman*, *Freakazoid*, *Tiny Toon Adventures*, *The Tick*, and *The New Pink Panther*.

Maurice LaMarche has built up a reputation as a voice actor's voice actor. Talk to almost any current vocal performer and his name will surely be mentioned. His success can also be seen in the legions of fans who turn up at signings and talk about his work on the internet.

An hour before an autograph session began at the Boston Warner Brothers Studio Store earlier this year, fans were eagerly lining up to see the two stars of *Pinky and The Brain*, LaMarche and Rob Paulsen (profiled in **ANIMATO!** #33).

Asked about how he reacts to such enthusiasm for his work, LaMarche replied, "I'm floored by it. Unbelievable numbers to come see us and tell us 'you guys are doing a great job,' and that means so much to me."

Quick with a joke or impersonation, LaMarche is part of a new generation of voice actors who justifiably take great pride in their work. LaMarche is also a fan of his colleagues' work.

"Rob Paulsen is probably the most giving actor I've ever worked with and you couldn't meet a nicer guy," said LaMarche who added, "Billy West [*Ren and Stimpy*, *Doug*, etc.] is one of the most monstrously talented persons I've ever met and I'm happy to call him my friend."

A former stand-up comic, it's easy to see his on-stage roots at an autograph session. LaMarche and Paulsen just don't sit at a table and sling out signatures. They talk to the fans, pose



©Warner Bros. 1996

for pictures, and perform for them. Ask for one of their voices and *voila*, there's the character right in front of you.

They even make taking a break performance art. A time-out for the two actors elicits a Pinky exclamation from Paulsen of "Potty Time!," and an affirmative "Yeeess!" from LaMarche. Both actors clearly relish the opportunity of meeting the fans.

"In voice acting you're paid very well, but you toil in relative anonymity," said LaMarche.

LaMarche characterized his career in animation as "a case of failing upwards...by accident."

Working the comedy club circuit in the late Seventies, LaMarche found himself in Toronto working at a club called Yuk Yuks. Representatives from the Canadian animation Nelvana were in the audience to see if they could find some potential vocal performers. They were impressed enough with LaMarche's mimicry to offer him two roles in their new television special *Easter Fever*.

LaMarche supplied impressions of Steve Martin and Don Rickles for characters participating in a roast for the Easter Bunny in the 1978 production. While he liked the work, success in stand-up comedy was his still his goal.

"My dreams for myself were very lofty," remembered LaMarche. "I saw myself in a big tv series making 60 bazillion dollars an episode, the fancy cars, the 15 houses and all that stuff.

And I've come to discover through friends of mine who've gone on to that, that that's not what makes you happy. It's just fine with me that I don't have that for myself."

Unlike his friend Jon Lovitz who is constantly recognized, LaMarche enjoys the fact the acclaim he's received for Pinky and The Brain (the only real hit of the fledgling WB Network) without the accompanying hassles of television stardom.

He deeply appreciates the respect he and Paulsen received from the producers of *Pinky and The Brain* who insisted the two stars be given a separate card in the end credits.

Despite his success, there are no star trappings with LaMarche. He is quick to acknowledge a number of people who have been instrumental in his career. He's deeply thankful to his agent at William Morris who took a chance on him by signing someone who hadn't already made a name for himself in the industry, and he is truly appreciative of the support veteran vocal performer Frank Welker gave him by talking him up to producers and directors.

Even with the help he was getting, LaMarche found breaking into the field was not easy. "I found out it's very hard work and it was a year before my first job. Auditioning, auditioning auditioning and not getting it, not getting it," said LaMarche.

A role in *Inspector Gadget* as Chief Quimby was a big break and it was followed by

Egon Spengler on *The Real Ghostbusters*. LaMarche was still pursuing his comedy career and split his day between the two.

Family tragedies cut short his comedy career, though. In 1987 LaMarche lost his father to a murder, and then his sister was killed in an automobile accident in 1989. LaMarche lost his drive to perform before an audience, and concentrated on his vocal performing.

When asked if he misses stand-up comedy, he thoughtfully replied, "Every now and again I get a little twinge for it. We [Rob Paulsen] checked into the hotel last night [for a signing appearance] and in the lobby was a comedy cabaret. Rob said to me, 'Hey, Moe, why don't you get up there and make your big comeback in Cherry Hill, NJ.' And I thought, 'Big joke.' But sure enough after dinner, we went by and I was looking through the window like a little kid at a candy store.

"I may go back to it one day, I have to take the Reagan jokes out of my act, and maybe punch up the *Fantasy Island* piece like maybe throwing it right out the window!," he continued with a laugh. "If that happens great, but I get a lot of creative juices flowing right in the arena of the studio. How much more can you ask for when you do 27 different voices on one episode of *The Critic*?"

That 27 voices on a *The Critic* episode is LaMarche's record for number of different voices in one show. "One of the most rewarding moments of my career was my two years on *The Critic*," he said with pride.

The vocal cast of *The Critic* would read each script aloud with the show's producer James L. Brooks, a man who has helped create some of television's most memorable comedies. For LaMarche, sitting at a large table with the rest of the cast and making Brooks laugh stands out as a significant moment in his career.

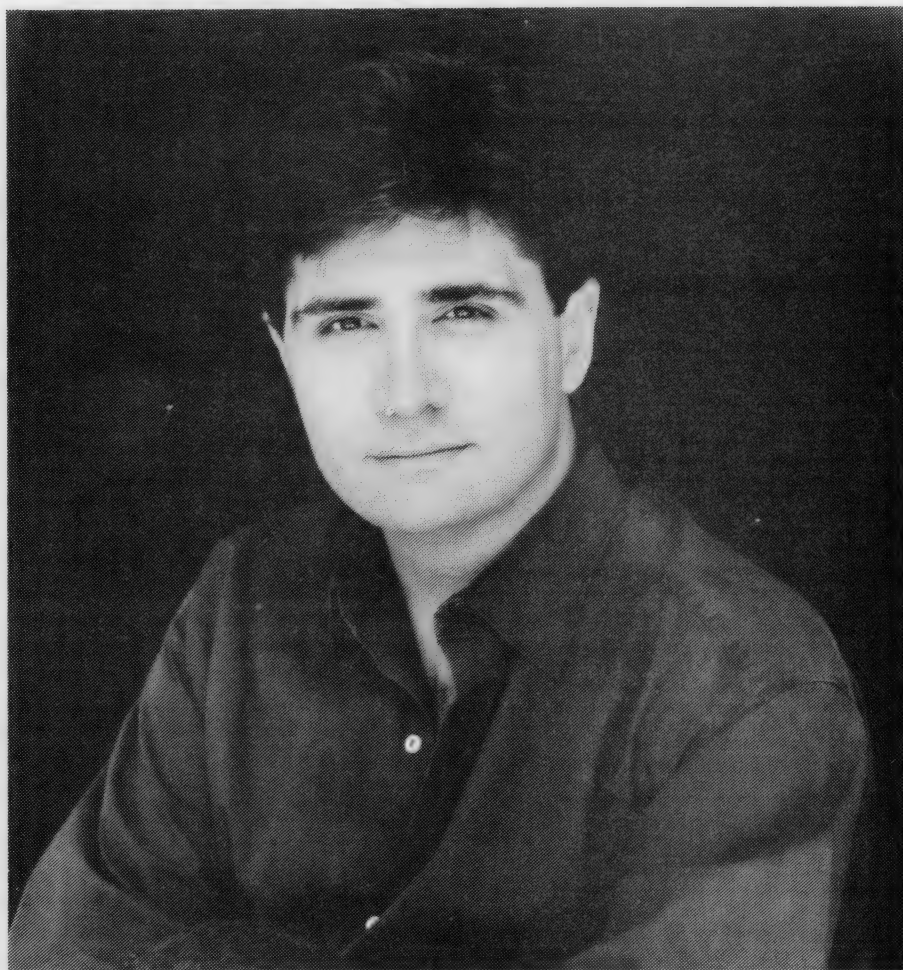
Despite good reviews, and respectable ratings when the show moved to the Fox television network, LaMarche said *The Critic* fell prey to the priorities of a new management team and was cancelled.

LaMarche relished working with Brooks who is a legend in television, and subsequently had the chance to the work with another legend, Ralph Bakshi on the trouble-plagued feature, *Cool World*.

"I heard all these horror stories about Ralph Bakshi, but apart from his trait of standing right next to you at the microphone smoking cigarettes in your face, that's the only negative I had about him," said LaMarche.

"I thought he was tremendous. He encouraged a lot of improvisation in the characters. For some reason he really took to me," continued LaMarche. "Ralph would show me a drawing and I just went nuts. I found my inner Billy West."

One of the great compliments LaMarche received during the recording of *Cool World*



Maurice LaMarche

occurred, LaMarche recalled, when "Bakshi told his engineer, 'Keep that f***** thing rolling. Everything that comes out of his f***** guy's mouth is brilliant! He's a f***** genius! Keep rolling! G** * don't even stop the f***** machine!'" (This anecdote was told in a letter perfect Bakshi impersonation.)

"That's not so say I am a 'f***** genius,' but rather at that point in time Ralph Bakshi thought I was! I loved working with him, and I'd kill to work with him again."

LaMarche would like to do more work in animated features and frequently auditions for roles.

"I did get a shot with *Pocahontas* and *Hunchback [of Notre Dame]*, but it wasn't my time yet at Disney."

LaMarche does admit to having a "little twinge of resentment" towards the Disney policy of hiring movie stars to perform voices, but he has no ill feelings towards the actors themselves. He said he can't blame superstars such as Mel Gibson for being interested in voice work as "it's a real kick to see your voice coming out of a character."

Voice acting is acting, LaMarche pointed out, regardless if the actor is a Mel Gibson or a Maurice LaMarche. There is far more to the

craft than just making goofy voices. For LaMarche, *The Brain* is simply not a voice, but a real characterization with considerable depth.

LaMarche noted, "*Pinky and The Brain* works because Rob Paulsen and Maurice LaMarche play two best friends who love each other dearly in spite of the antagonistic relationship."

LaMarche's technique for creating a characterization is to look at a drawing and "ask 'What does he want?' I then find that part of me. If it's greed [for example], then out comes a greedy voice. With *The Brain* it was a pure case of looking at a character and saying, 'Oh! He's Orson Welles.'"

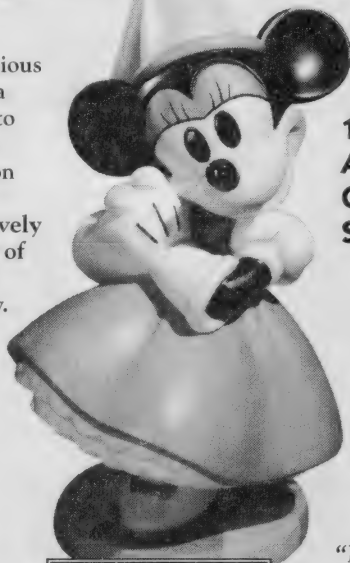
Equally challenging as creating a new voice is continuing an established voice. LaMarche played Popeye on *Popeye and Son* and has also performed as Yosemite Sam. "The greatest challenge is *not* to bring too much of yourself to it," he explained. "I was very careful to stay close to Mr. Mercer [i.e. characterization] as possible, and I call him 'Mr. Mercer' because of my respect for him." LaMarche considered playing Popeye a "great honor."

Next up for LaMarche is a new series he recently started recording, *Capt. Simian and the*

Continued on Page 63

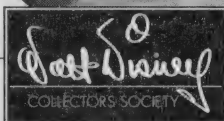
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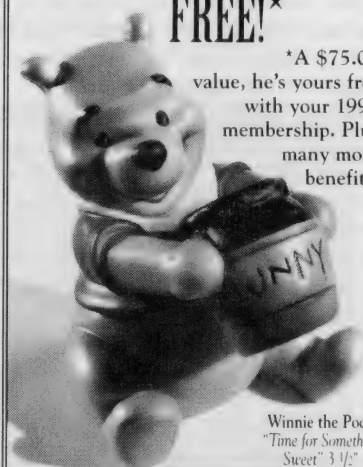
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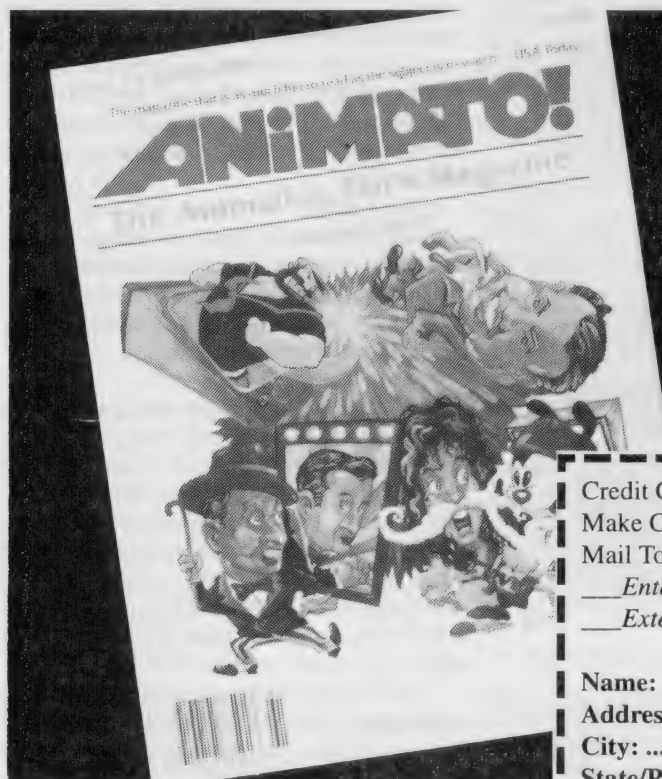
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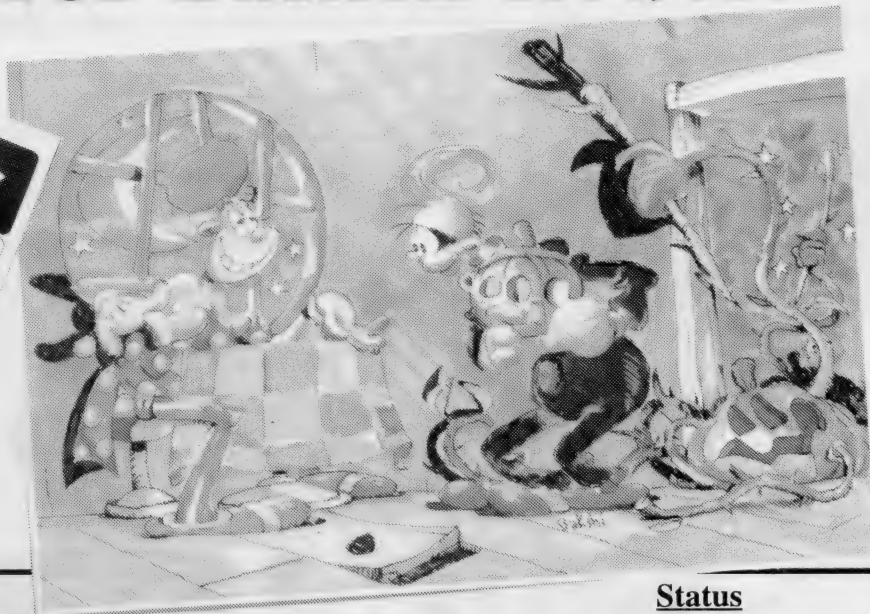
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Description

Digest size, covered the animation scene from 1983 to 1987.
Ralph Bakshi, Roger Rabbit, Chinese Animation, Jack Hannah, Film Poll.
Friz Freleng, Termite Terrace, George Scribner, Koko Komments.
Pixar, John Lasseter, Virgil Ross, Disney Studio, 'Toons On Tape.
Bugs Bunny, Robotech, Pinocchio, Roger Rabbit's Roots, Bill Scott, Bill Justice.
Maurice Noble, Chuck Jones, Tiny 'Toons, Rescuers, Grim Natwick, Anime.
Kirk Wise, Sally Cruikshank, Myron Waldman, Walt Peregoy, Nickelodeon.
Aladdin, Yogi Bear, Walter Clinton, 'Toon Music, John Musker, Ferngully.
Ray Harryhausen, Bill Plymton, Pre-Code Animation, Clutch Cargo, Comics.
Popeye, Ray Harryhausen, Darkwing Duck, 'Toons on Tape.
Batman, Cartoons That Time Forgot, Eek! The Cat, Jurassic Park, Comic Honchos.
Batman Part 2, Beavis and Butt-Head, Lost World, Anime Dubbing, George Pal.
Voices: Lucille Bliss, Billy West, Jonathan Harris, Sid Raymond. Sniffles, Jim Smith.
Walter Lantz, Lion King, Fred Stuhr, Cheryl Chase, Kricfalusi, Seibert, Bakshi, Murray.
Horror, June Foray, Space Ghost, Rocko, Animaniacs, Casper, Real Monsters.
Gerald Scarfe, Pink Floyd: The Wall, Don Messick, Bolex Bros., Felix, Stan Lee.
Censorship, Pocahontas, Gumby, Bluto, Goofy, Friz Freleng, Seymour Reit, Swat Kats.
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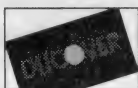
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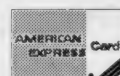
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In Praise of 8mm

By Harry McCracken

Call me a technological renegade, a throwback. All my cartoon-loving friends seem to be investing in laserdisc players, 27-inch TVs, and satellite dishes, the better to watch classic American animation in all its glory.

So why am I sitting in my darkened living room, using an 8mm projector to cast an Inspector Willoughby cartoon against the wall? A silent, heavily-edited, black-and-white Inspector Willoughby cartoon?

It wasn't nostalgia that attracted me to 8mm cartoons; my family had no home-movie setup when I was a kid. None of my friends seemed to, either. Indeed, the only times I was reminded that anyone did was on rare occasions when my father dragged me on a trip to the local camera shop: I'd entertain myself by browsing through the spinning racks of Disney films.

My only memories of actually watching 8mm animation come from occasional family dinners at the Ground Round. Walter Lantz cartoons flickered silently in one corner of the room, a sideshow to the main attractions: greasy steaks, pitchers of root beer, and free popcorn; for all I know, those cartoons flicker still today.

For whatever reason, though, I'm finally becoming addicted to 8mm home movies — at least twenty years after the rest of the country forgot all about them. Where do you find an 8mm projector to buy these days? They aren't exactly plentiful. I got mine, a plasticky little GAF model from the 1970s, for \$10 from a wizened old man who had a cellarful of them. It's decrepid and it's flimsy, but it works just fine and can play either ordinary 8mm or Super 8 reels.

The movies themselves are a bit simpler to locate; take a look around the nooks and crannies of your local flea market or antique store and you're likely to spot some, usually at giveaway prices. (To get to the cartoons, you'll need to sift through other 8mm fare, such as extracts from Abbott and Costello flicks and highlights from

fifty year-old boxing matches.) I suspect that it's the colorful boxes that keep home movies in circulation, not the thought that anyone is going to want to watch the films inside.

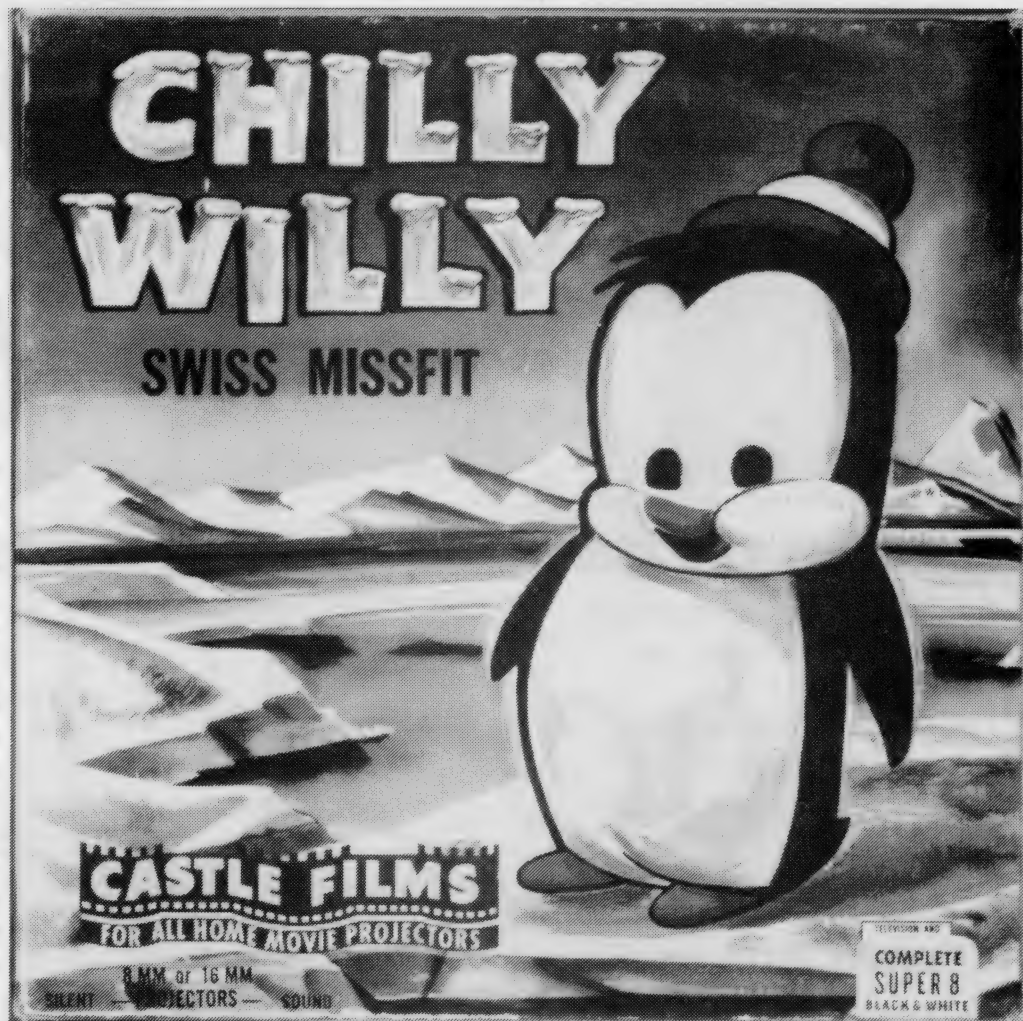
But I do. And I'm discovering that 8mm home animation is — or should I say was? — a fascinating world.

For one thing, it's a distinctly different world than that of big-time theatrical animation. In a theater or on TV, Chilly Willy is a distinctly minor cartoon character; in the world of 8mm, he's a bonafide star, whose films were among the most widely circulated of any character. Walter Lantz characters in general had high profiles in the home-movie business, being, as

they were, the top attractions of Castle Films, one of the leading home-movie companies.

Official Films was another home-movie powerhouse. I have one of its catalogs from the late 1940s that's a veritable museum of obscure cartoon shorts. Van Beuren, Columbia, Ted Eshbaugh — the company dealt in the work of the most hapless of all cartoon studios. Most of the films it sold were one-shots with generic cartoon characters; about the closest it got to a star was Van Beuren's enormously forgettable Cubby Bear, whom Official inexplicably redubbed Brownie.

Whatever the studio, 8mm home-movie cartoons are generally edited down, often



drastically so; they're in black-and-white; and they feature subtitles instead of sound. (I realize that color home movies with audio tracks exist, but I'm not interested in them; color and sound would spoil the purity of the experience, somehow.)

Chuck Jones has rightly said that you judge if a cartoon's any good by seeing whether you can tell what's going on with the sound turned down. But even when a silent 8mm cartoon passes this basic test, it usually isn't very funny. Viewing a silent Warner Bros. cartoon, for example, impresses upon you very quickly just how important Mel Blanc's voice, Carl Stalling's music, and the dialogue of such writers as Mike Maltese were. (8mm cartoons usually had extremely perfunctory on-screen captions, presumably so they could be quickly taken in by inexperienced young readers.) Even the most pedestrian of Woody Woodpecker cartoons takes on new qualities when watched on 8mm; seeing Woody laugh without *hearing* Woody laugh is an odd experience indeed.

Okay, so 8mm cartoons are a laughably

rinkydink form of amusement by contemporary standards. It's worth remembering, though, that in the old days, home movies were by no means inexpensive fare. My Official Films catalog from the late 1940s lists 8mm cartoon prints at \$5.50 apiece — a considerable entertainment investment in an era when a comic book sold for a dime and a movie ticket cost a quarter. Projectors, too, were luxury items: the 1972 Montgomery Ward catalog lists several models, from between \$60 and \$160 apiece; more, in constant dollars, than a good VCR costs today. To put these prices into perspective, the same catalog has car batteries for \$10, men's suits, for \$55, and a sofa for \$130. (It also has a primitive reel-to-reel, black-and-white video camera and player for \$1200 — one of the priciest items in the whole book.)

That we can now pay \$200 or less for a high-quality video tape player is pretty impressive, but what's downright remarkable is how cheap, and widely available, cartoons have become. I can walk into just about any supermarket or drugstore in my neighborhood

and choose from a selection of uncut, beautifully-restored Disney features — with sound and color, even! — for fifteen dollars or so apiece. If you'd prophesied this utopian situation to me twenty years ago, as I rummaged through 8mm cartoons at the photo store while waiting for my dad, I would never have believed you.

When pressed, I'll admit that I've got those glorious video copies of *Snow White* and *Pinocchio* on my shelf, and I'm grateful to have them. Still, I wouldn't trade all the Disney tapes in the world for my collection of ancient home-movie cartoons. Anyone care to join me for a private screening of the Super 8 edition of Paul Terry's *The Happy Cobblers*? 

Harry McCracken, who works at PC World magazine when he's not covering weird and wonderful old animation in this column, wrote this column on a thirteen year-old laptop computer. Know of any obscure cartoons he should know about? Write him c/o Animato.

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J.J. SEDELMAIER: ANIMATION THE WAY IT USED TO BE (EXCEPT FOR THE COMPUTERS AND STUFF)

by Jim Fanning and Russell Miller

Watching for good, creative, experimental animation on television often means watching commercials. That's where some of the most elaborate and imaginative animation is happening—and why not? That's where the big budgets—and sometimes an even greater investment of imagination—are.

But the frustration of spotting great commercial animation is not only how tantalizingly fast the spots zip by, but the lack of credits in these mini-films. That's the reason few know the name J.J. Sedelmaier, the creative force behind some of the best commercial animation around.

J.J. Sedelmaier does not limit himself or his small New York studio to commercials, however. They've also produced some notably creative and outrageous bumpers, public service announcements and entertainment. In fact this young production company, J.J. Sedelmaier Productions, Inc., which was established in January 1991, has become one of the top commercial animation houses and is possibly the most prolific in the country. And Sedelmaier's productions are stuff that you can't miss. If you remember the Saturday Night Live commercial parody "Clucking' Chicken", the morphing "historical logo" NBC network ID, or the retro-styled Home Savings commercials, you've noticed.

Housed in a 1920's office building—the oldest in White Plains, New York—the Sedelmaier studio has some feeling of the inventive zest of the animation industry in its formative years. "We really do, I think, have a studio in a classic sense, where everyone shares information, everyone is involved in all the different aspects," notes Sedelmaier. "I've got people in the editing room with me to look at the film, using problem solving techniques and figuring how to translate the style, and everything is considered until it proves that it's just not going to work. It's like an animation lab and that's what I want. I want to make sure people have an opportunity to try to do different things."

Although as often as not developing original designs, the Sedelmaier studio has earned a reputation for taking established styles and adapting them to their work. "When we get storyboards from agencies that don't have a direction design wise, what I do is help them choose a designer or a point of view to go with," explains Sedelmaier. "Sometimes I'll suggest somebody very well known, sometimes I'll suggest somebody who they've never seen



J.J. Sedelmaier

before. Then it's our responsibility to properly translate the designer's style to film. That may seem simple but it's not an easy task at all because each project is different and we try to take on challenges. We're looking for opportunities to do something new all the time. Just translating an artistic technique to film can be very complicated, but when you get it, it's great."

Effusive and enthusiastic, J.J. Sedelmaier speaks passionately about art, design, and especially his great love, animation. Born in 1956 in Chicago, Sedelmaier majored in Art at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, but also took some courses on film and animation. Graduating in 1978 he considered going to the west coast to do animation, but being more familiar with the east coast, he decided on New York and comic books.

Showing his portfolio around, Sedelmaier quickly realized there was little work to be had in comic books, but that there was opportunity in the animation industry. Following a lead, obtained from the PBS station in New York, Sedelmaier contacted animator Tony Eastman. Eastman gave the fledgling animator some freelance assistant work, which lead to eventual employment at the animation studio Perpetual Motion. There, J.J. cut his professional teeth on such series as *The Berenstein Bears* and *Strawberry Shortcake*.

"That's where I got my introduction to how the industry worked on the production side," remembers Sedelmaier. "One animator there was Yan Svachak. He was the guy who animated Punchy in the Hawaiian Punch

commercials. He had this great way of working, this integrity. However, the first time I met him was my first day on the job. He comes up to me and he said, 'Hi, there, son, so you want some advice from an old-timer?' I thought this was great and I said yeah. And he said, 'See the door over there? Get out of this business. Run! It's dead! If you got a brain cell in your head, you'll bolt!' Not the advice I was looking for, not the encouragement."

It was 1981, and, as it turned out, a young artist truly interested in animation could learn a lot from many of the veteran animators toiling away on commercials and cheap television series. "Even though you were supposed to work from 9 to 5, I worked from 9 to 10," recalls Sedelmaier. "I just stuck my nose in the editing room and sometimes became a real pain. But that gave me a good idea of what was going on on the production side."

Then, in 1984, Sedelmaier joined legendary cartoonist R.O. Blechman's *The Ink Tank*. "I'd been working there for about four months and Bob made me his producer out of the blue," reveals Sedelmaier. "Once I was a producer and got to really see how that end of it worked, that was all the information I needed, on top of liking to work with people. I got more and more encouragement, and I got to meet more and more people, and it turned into a very comfortable situation." J.J.'s directing credits at *The Ink Tank* included about 120 *Fido Dido* bumpers for CBS Saturday Morning.

By 1991 Sedelmaier was ready to seek new creative horizons. Building on his reputation as a producer/director at *The Ink*

Tank, Sedelmaier opted to stake his own claim in the east coast animation industry. "My wife Patrice and I decided to open our own place. Patrice is the business manager and I'm the creative end of the place and the director of the studio."

Having artistic independence opened the door to some innovative animation projects. Almost immediately, Sedelmaier was presented with the opportunity to animate, in series form, the characters MTV had bought from primitive animator Mike Judge. The names of these cartoon cretins: Beavis and Butt-Head.

"Mike Judge's animation is not sophisticated, it's perceptive," observes Sedelmaier who worked with Judge on the production of Beavis and Butt-Head. "Mike is a brilliant observer of people, and the way he would translate what he saw in people to his films was just great."

Judge's style is raw drawing, incorporating scrawly pen and ink with colored pencil backgrounds. Sedelmaier pinpoints the character's hands as typical of Judge's style. "When Beavis and Butt-Head are doing air guitar, their fingers are articulated and they're as carefully drawn as Mike could do them. If he didn't need the hands and the boys were just walking down the street, then the hands became these shriveled-up little appendages. And that was the kind of stuff I found really intriguing."

In accepting the artistically exciting job of animating the series, Sedelmaier also accepted an impossible deadline. "The challenge with Beavis was how do you do 120 minutes of animation between November of '92 and what was originally March of '93 and later pushed to May," marvels Sedelmaier. "How you gonna do that much animation when you usually need six months to do 30 minutes?"

Sedelmaier Productions used the digital ink and paint capabilities of U.S. Animation to make the impossible deadline plausible. "Isn't there some way that we can do the repeated actions—like Beavis and Butt-Head sitting on the couch—and store it and somehow call it up when we need it? Build up a library of the air guitar, build up a library of the laughing, build up a library of the front view, side view, etcetera and that made it possible. That had been done before, but I don't think it had been done under such a tight schedule. The basic idea was that we could do this if we color scan the backgrounds to keep the integrity of Mike's style with the pastels and the pen. When it came to the characters, they were done on cel so we could deal with a flat paint approach."

When *Beavis and Butt-Head* finally premiered, the original humor and the animation's raw vitality made the series a runaway success, and it quickly became MTV's most popular show. MTV wanted to keep its winning team for the show's much anticipated second season, but Sedelmaier thought better of

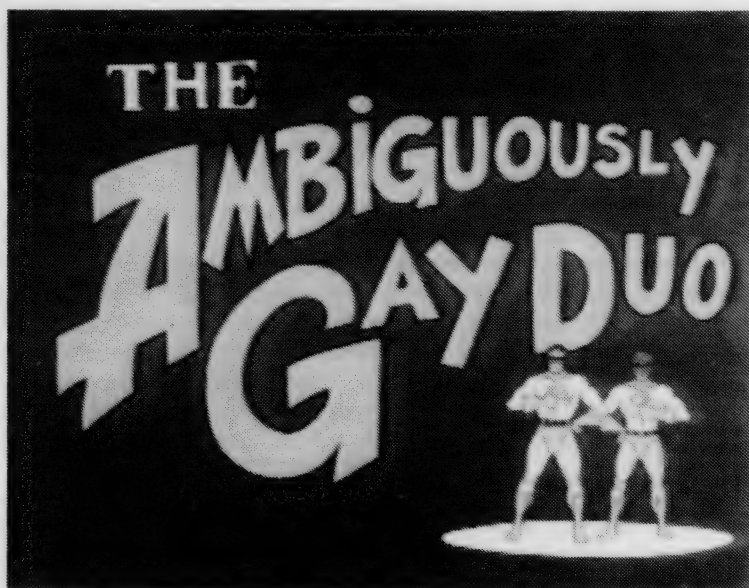
getting back on the unrelenting merry-go-round.

"When it came time to do the second season, we looked back on all the time that we had spent and we realized, as exciting and as much fun as it was, there was no way we were going to be able to do Beavis and commercials and do justice to the commercials. Being as young as the company was then, I felt that if we put ourselves out of circulation, it was going to kill us." Sedelmaier makes it clear that his production house was not forced off of the Beavis and Butt-Head gravy train by MTV. "It was a very mutual understanding. We would have been a wing of MTV or Viacom and I just wasn't ready for that. I don't know if I'm ever going to be ready for something like that." Instead Sedelmaier embraced a wide variety of imaginative projects, some short, some not so short.

One of the first jobs Sedelmaier's newly liberated studio took on was three new segments of the classic—and very traditional—ABC *Schoolhouse Rock* series. "Going from Beavis into *Schoolhouse Rock* was like a pail of ice water," comments Sedelmaier of the

Their relationship began when Smigel, who was head writer on *Saturday Night Live*, brought J.J. aboard to animate a commercial parody for a fast food chicken chain. The typically goofy animated spokes-chicken, Cluckie, voiced by Adam Sandler, is cheesy by design complete with thick black outlines and corny catch phrases ("Whee! Look at me!"). The live action/animated spot starts out much like a normal, albeit bad, commercial, but takes a serious left turn when Cluckie gets his head hacked off ("Heads up!") in an unappetizing demonstration of how Clucking' Chicken is prepared. Cluckie's decapitated noggin keeps squawking as he continues the guided tour until the oxygen runs out of his brain. "Bein' dead never tasted so good," he boasts as his severed neck continues to bleed in an outlandish cartoon fashion. Outrageous and irreverent, "Clucking' Chicken" has gone down as one of *Saturday Night Live*'s most infamous commercial parodies and one of the few to include animation.

Another Sedelmaier/Smigel collaboration was even more outrageous, but most interesting in its loving recreation of television's most



The Ambiguously Gay Duo matched the controversial tone of The Dana Carvey Show.

Schoolhouse Rock segments he produced, which included "Dollars and Sense" (1994). "Schoolhouse Rock had a nice integrity but you can't get sweeter and gentler than that. No bowling balls going off the edge of viaducts in *Schoolhouse Rock*. Nobody bursting into flames spontaneously. We would handle stuff like *Schoolhouse Rock* just to keep the longer format and try to keep things available to train people on."

Less conventional, but more in keeping with Sedelmaier's trademark cutting edge creativity are the entertainment segments he has produced with comedy writer Robert Smigel.

utilized animation genre—Saturday morning limited—make that very limited—animation. Produced for ABC's satirical variety program, *The Dana Carvey Show*, "The Ambiguously Gay Duo" combines typically bland superhero antics with an underlying debate on the duo's relationship.

"When Robert called about 'The Ambiguously Gay Duo', he sent me the script and I had never laughed out loud at a script before. I felt if I was going to write a script like this, this is what I would have written. Once he said he wanted to do it like the old *Superman* or *Super Friends* stuff, I thought, oh, boy, this is

perfect. We even went to the extent of doing the opening titles as an optical. I didn't want to do a video title. I wanted to shoot everything on film because I wanted it to have all the quirks of film. I would have liked to have made it more grainy, washed out the color a little bit and just make it look like one of those cartoons that are just so bad, when you actually study them you can feel the brain matter seeping out of your ears. That's the horrible, limited animation that was being done in the Sixties and Seventies — but I remember being excited that at least I could see Superman on TV."

Sedelmaier and his staff took great pains to authentically reproduce the cheap look and feel of those actionless action cartoons. "I got a bunch of copies of the old cartoons and we watched them here and I sent a copy to Robert at *The Dana Carvey Show* and he passed it to the music and the effects people so that they could try to emulate the soundtrack stuff." "Superpals" Ace and Gary are sent by the clichéd Commissioner of the derivative city of Metroville to battle the obvious villain, Bighead. In the ensuing melee Bighead and his two generic henchmen argue not only about Ace and Gary's sexuality, but also the appropriateness of arguing about it, in this postmodern outing of the supposed homoerotic subtext of superhero duos.

Between his stints as head writer on *Saturday Night Live* and *The Dana Carvey Show*, Robert Smigel was working for *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. There he asked J.J. to do the original title sequence. "Wherever he goes he ends up bringing us into a project," laughs Sedelmaier. "The Conan O'Brien thing didn't have much of an edge to it. It was based on Conan's self-caricature. The beginning was taking inspiration from that. It was well done and all that, but it wasn't a zinger. It kind of reflects Conan, very approachable and very pleasant."

Some of J.J.'s most seen work may be his ID's for various networks, including wild *Liquid Television*-like MTV bumpers. NBC tapped on Sedelmaier's shoulder when they were rejuvenating the peacock logo in 1993. "It turned out what they wanted to do was resurrect the peacock as an icon because here they had this wonderful trademark and they weren't doing anything with it," recalls Sedelmaier. "Everyone has really responded to the historical ID—the one of all the different NBC logos through the ages—very well. It was great for me because I've always loved the old graphics and I have a bunch of books on logos in general. It was colorful, it was textural. I actually dragged film around to scratch it up and shot it on black and white stock so it would look different than the newer stuff."

Sedelmaier's successful execution of the boldly graphic ID led to another assignment, this time with the world's most celebrated

caricaturist. "Jeff Rowe of NBC, who was the one who came up with the idea, called and said we're trying to arrange for Al Hirschfeld to do an ID and I gave Jeff no alternative. 'You must let me do that,' I said. 'If you tell me about this and then don't let me do it, I'm going to personally come there and scrawl 'Nina' on your forehead seven times,'" Sedelmaier laughs. "Al Hirschfeld did three huge oversize drawings of the peacock, and we took inspiration from his drawings. I found it very 'necessary' to go over to his house to pick up another drawing. That was a treat in itself. I have a lot of respect for the people I work with and all these are very well known artists and cartoonists. But Hirschfeld is on such a completely different level that I was ga-ga to have the opportunity to come into his house and watch him do some drawings. He sits in a barber chair and draws on this old drawing table and he has all these things from all over the world."

But Sedelmaier's creative claim to fame is and continues to be commercials.

"Companies like to use animation in commercials because it has a human element to it. It's hand-done; it softens the message; it makes it palatable somehow. And big corporations love it. Trying to pair up a designer, an artist, a cartoonist, an illustrator with the project is sometimes a challenge. Especially if there's not a point of view to begin with at the agency. Or worse off, at the client. Trying to get them to see your point of view is half the battle."

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health commissioned Sedelmaier Productions to do an anti-smoking ad based on the Gary Trudeau *Doonesbury* character, Mr. Butts, an anthropomorphic cigarette and tobacco industry spokesperson/lobbyist. Here the challenge was bringing a figure from a newspaper comic strip into animation.

"'Mr. Butts Goes to Washington' was great because, as cartoony and as simply drawn as Gary Trudeau's stuff is, you have to be aware of how the drawing has to go into a different realm. It's not on the printed page anymore. We kept it very cartoony because the Mr. Butts character is a take-off, almost an old Fleischer cartoon character. But I wanted Mr. Butts to have a lot of personality in the way he moved because of Billy West's [the voice artist best known for *Ren and Stimpy*] performance. Billy's voice characterized Mr. Butts as a huckster. He's moving all over the place and he's doing everything short of wearing a straw hat and a striped coat and saying, 'Step right up.' He's a fast talker, so he's got to have a lot of personality. And Gary was terrific—he's so bright and such a good writer. The ultimate approval, both in terms of picture and track, had to be Gary's. So that was refreshing in itself. When you do commercials, you usually have to deal with committees. It was so biting too; it was such a

biting thing where you see Mr. Butts in the Senate chambers and he's talking about how kids are terrific. And here he is selling all this crap to try to get them hooked. I didn't want to do anything glitzy because I wanted to keep it in the same realm as the strip and keep it very cartoony. We did a glow where the coal is on top of his head because he's a human cigarette, and we did a bottom lit optical glow, and it transformed him from a cartoon character into the anti-Christ."

The best of J.J. Sedelmaier's commercials are the Home Savings spots. These black and white retro ads have gained much attention for their fidelity to television animation of the 1950s. Rather than employing a lot of high-tech whistles and bells, the ads revel in the graphic straightforwardness typical of the limited animation seen in some of the most creative commercials from television's early years. Promoting Home Savings as a throw-back to a simpler, more service oriented era, the stylized spots with their charmingly two dimensional characters and backgrounds look as though they were dug out of the firm's advertising vaults.

"I understood that style very well because I worked with a lot of people through the years that were around in the industry at that time. One person in particular, Ray Favada, I brought in as a designer on it, but he ended up working more on the storyboard and I ended up kind of taking over more of the design," says Sedelmaier. "I wanted to try to make it seem as authentic as possible, to pile the plate pretty high with all the old techniques and devices, but I didn't want to overdo it, because if you overdo it, then you give it away. I wanted people to wonder if it was a real vintage commercial. It bugged me that they put the slogan in writing, 'Except for the computers and stuff.' I wanted to keep that line just audio. I wanted to make sure all the fades were optical and not video and I certainly didn't want to do anything like digital ink and paint even though that could have been very easy to do. We left in mistakes, made the voices tinny, and made the film somewhat scratched and dirty."

"The Home Savings commercials are very popular all over the world. At the Independent Animation Society when we entered one in the festival a guy named Howard Beckerman, who's been in the industry for years, was sitting behind me and he leaned over and said, 'Gee, Jay, I think I worked on that spot.'"

"One of the biggest compliments I got was from Billy West. We showed him the reel and when the Home Savings things came on he said, 'You did that?' And then his wife Vee was here and she said, 'We were in L.A. and Billy was really bummed about something. We were in a hotel room, we're just sitting there and the TV was on, and that commercial came on and he stood up out of bed and he pointed at the TV and



said, 'Whoever did that get's it. They get it.'"

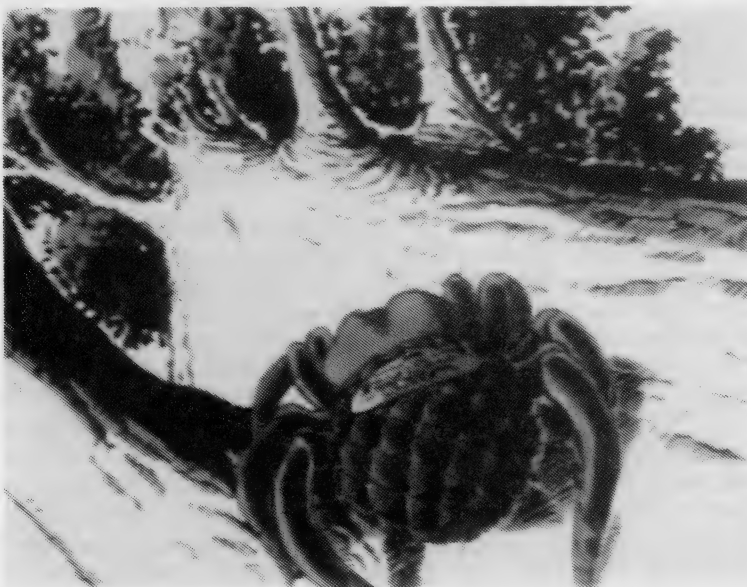
When asked what the future holds for his dynamic studio J.J. Sedelmaier responded by saying what wouldn't happen. "We're often asked don't you want to work on features. I've been offered the opportunity to do that; it usually involves relocating to the west coast. It means somehow shutting down the studio for a period of time and none of that is appealing to me. Working in commercials gives me all the opportunities, and the challenges keep coming in that arena. It's a great training ground for the people in the studio as well because you never really have any two projects that are alike, unless you're dealing with repeat business." But when pressed, Sedelmaier admits that an original, studio generated project has its appeal. "I think it's time for us to start doing our own thing. I think we need to do something within the walls here instead of waiting for something to happen. I think what we need to do is take the stuff that we learned and try to apply it to something entertaining.

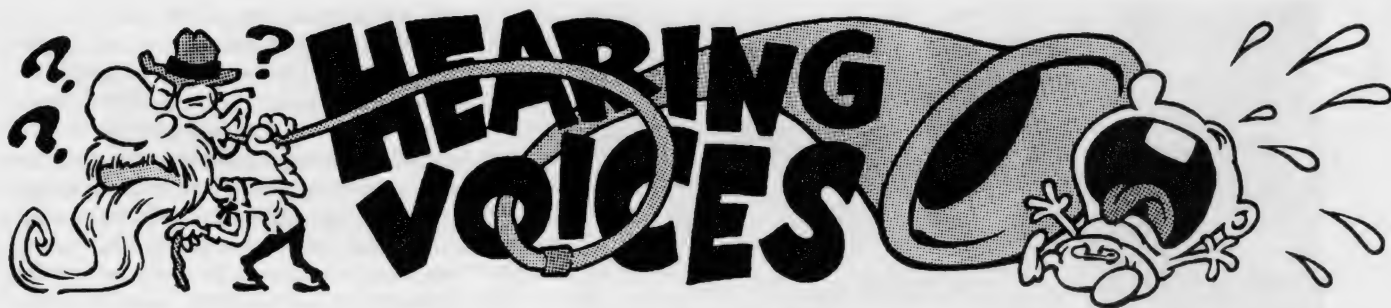
"I'd like to do something unique. I know the most important thing is having a good story. I can have something that's visually terrific, but if it doesn't hold together or isn't entertaining storywise, that's not going to make any difference. There's so many films, cartoons, and so forth, out there that are visually terrific but don't hold together. The worse thing I could do is bore somebody with nice visuals."



The team of Jim Fanning and Russ Miller last chronicled the the first season of *Beavis and Butt-head* for ANIMATO!

When your studio does animation for commercials the subject matter can go from Boston Markets' new sandwiches (Top) to feminine hygiene products (Center) to sneakers! (Bottom)





Danny Webb - An Appreciation and Update

by Keith Scott

The Dave Weber/Danny Webb mystery outlined by Hames Ware in Issue #34 is fascinating. Between 1936-42 there were many cartoons featuring this talented mimic, some of them containing performances at least as brilliant as the best of Mel Blanc. Herewith a brief review.

Danny Webb often worked for that master of the absurd Tex Avery, during the latter's tenure at Warners. One of his funniest performances occurs in Avery's classic 1939 gangster spoof, *Thugs with Dirty Mugs*. Webb essays the voice of the tough boss hoodlum who, while lecturing his team of goons, suddenly interrupts both himself and the cartoon, exclaiming, in a true Avery moment, "Say, folks, I kinda sound like Eddy Robinson, huh? Yeah! And I can do a Fred Allen, too!" He then proceeds to render an incredibly accurate impersonation of the cynical radio comic, a voice which Webb often performed for Columbia and Walter Lantz.

Also for Avery, Danny voiced a raft of uncanny Joe Penner imitations in films like *Cinderella Meets Fella*, along with a great Lionel Barrymore-esque professor who is seen lecturing an oceanic school in *Fresh Fish*. Webb's "froggy" trick voice popped up in cartoon after cartoon, including Tex's 1938 hillbilly epic, *A Feud There Was* ("McCoy's is skunks, mah Pa said so. You 'uns can't shoot straight!....").

At the Walter Lantz studio Webb can be heard doing a Rochester-like tortoise in *Andy Panda Goes Fishing* (the same Rochester voice heard at Warners in Bob Clampett's *Pied Piper Porky* among others), as well as a great frantic Irish cop in *Kitten Mittens*, from 1940.

Meanwhile, over at Columbia he is the main heavy (with Mel Blanc as his cohort) in *Crop Chasers*, while earlier at this studio Danny Webb demonstrates a gigantic range in *The Big Birdcast*, a cartoon from 1938 which satirizes all the current radio heavyweights. He does Penner, Allen, Ed Wynn, Milton Berle, Harry Von Zell, Parkyakarkus, Eddie Cantor and numerous others.

Since I began collaborating with Graham Webb & Hames Ware, virtually no information

was to be found on this frustratingly elusive performer. And so it was that in January 1995 I decided I had to undertake some intensive research. But beyond the photos and basic information uncovered at the Motion Picture Academy Library, we still had nothing of real depth until I was able to make a long-awaited trip to the invaluable Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library. And here, finally, an article came to light which confirms Webb as one of the most important contributors to cartoon voices before the rise and rise of Mel Blanc; it also enumerates some of Webb's vast range. The piece is from 1939, and reads as follows:

That Voice Finally Comes to Life

One of the unusual sidelights of the motion picture production industry is the case of young Danny Webb.

Webb has been an essential part of countless cartoons during the past three years, but has never been seen by the millions of theatergoers who have appreciated his work, because he has been nothing but a voice. Lionel Barrymore and Herman Bing, Chinaman, Russian and Swede, Oswald the Rabbit, Pete the Pup and Scrappy have all been heard through the voice of Danny Webb, who is considered screenland's most versatile sound imitator. But now Webb will come into his own.

He has been signed to head a cast which will demonstrate in a picture just how voices are dubbed into a film.

If only we knew whether this tantalizing film still exists. A follow-up piece from a *Variety* review dated 1950 confirms Webb living back in New York, and hosting a kid's show called *Danny Webb's G.I. Juniors*'. The unsigned reviewer notes:

In the guise of the sad sack character he made famous during World War II, Danny Webb delivered a comedy monolog, acted in some sketches and introduced the kiddie talent. Amiable and unpretentious, Webb made the kind of emcee that should appeal to the young

viewer.

Well, finally we can say we have something - admittedly it's not much, and there appears to be nothing in any reference post-1950! But at least it's a start. And now thanks to **Animato!**, Webb - one of the most talented voices in animation history - can finally get the recognition he has been denied for sixty years. (By the way, a future article will identify those voice imitators in cartoons who followed in Webb's wake during World War II and beyond, including Kent Rogers and Dick Nelson.)

And now dear readers, it's your turn in the Danny Webb saga. Is there anyone out there able to help us discover more about this fine performer who's lived in unjust obscurity for more than half a century.

- Does anyone (veteran film collectors, perhaps) have a video copy of Webb's one starring role in the 1939 Columbia short-subject, *A Star is Shorn*? If so, this column's authors would be willing to pay for a copy.

- Is anyone in possession of any New York area actor-agent directories of the 1940's and 50's, containing pictures or information on Webb?

- Finally, if any relatives of Danny Webb are reading this - if the man is still alive, please let us know immediately via this magazine so that we can interview him for posterity.

And now to yet another unheralded aspect of cartoon voicework -

The *Hearing Voices* column is dedicated to the many unbilled radio artists who helped make theatrical cartoons such an enjoyable experience for the two decades covering the years 1935-55. The soundtracks of these mini-classics were all the richer for the talents of such performers as Frank Graham, Sara Berner, Billy Bletcher, and of course the relatively better-known names like Pinto Colvig and Mel Blanc.

In conducting the research into this ill-documented field, it gradually became apparent that it was not just radio's gifted dialect experts

and mimics of the period who made the cartoons "sing". It was a mix of superb musicians and sound effects, so often seemingly subliminal in such a visually-oriented artform.

Cartoon music, in particular, is an area that needs much further scholarship. While the great Carl W. Stalling has finally been accorded long overdue fame for his splendid quarter century at Warner Brothers cartoons, there remain others equally deserving of this belated recognition. Innumerable Hollywood 'toons of the 1930's, from those of Walter Lantz through Columbia to Disney, were in fact incredibly intricate mini musicals, with - if one cares to listen as well as watch - often brilliant lyrics, lush arrangements and superb vocalizing.

Thus, the soloists and vocal groups heard in countless vintage animated gems are another of the ongoing research projects for this column's team. Think back to some of the acknowledged classics of the genre, like MGM's *Swing Wedding* (1936), and Chuck Jones's pivotal, style-rocking *The Dover Boys* (1942), and imagine those films minus their musical elements. And dozens of cartoons that are far more obscure, from Lantz's 1935 color short *Candyland*, to Columbia's Oscar-nominated 1943 novelty item, *Imagination*, benefitted from rich, funny scores and librettos, featuring a raft of Hollywood's professional session singers, many of whom were heard in cartoon after cartoon.

One of the greatest vocal groups in Hollywood was *The Sportsmen*, formed by Thurl Ravenscroft in 1936. A breakaway quartet from the Paul Taylor Chorus, they performed on scores of radio shows, like Bing Crosby's *Kraft Music Hall*, and *Al Pearce and His Gang* (under the name of Marie Greene and Her Merry Men - Marie Greene was a coloratura soprano who

worked for Disney and others).

It's *The Sportsmen* who are heard in many Schlesinger/Warner cartoons, like the aforementioned *The Dover Boys*, singing the college glee-club choruses. Carl Stalling contracted them for other Chuck Jones films, like *Conrad the Sailor* (*Over the Sea, Let's go Men*), and *Snowman's Land* (*Far into the North*), as well as cartoons by Friz Freleng (*Fifth Column Mouse* and *Confederate Honey*), Hardaway and Dalton (*Fagin's Freshman*), and Tex Avery (*Dangerous Dan McFoo*).

Thurl Ravenscroft, their glorious basso-profundo, was drafted in March 1943, and *The Sportsmen* were re-formed with a less distinctive bass baritone named Gurney Bell. They became famous as the vocal group on *The Jack Benny Program*. In 1947, when Ravenscroft again donned civilian clothes, he soon formed a new group, *The Mello-Men*, who were gainfully employed in many Disney films of the 1950's with features like *Alice In Wonderland* and shorts like *Trick or Treat* to their credit.

Many other talented groups gave splendid audio back-up to theatrical cartoons, including *The Kings Men*, *The Pied Pipers*, and an obscure black quartet called *The Basin Street Boys*.

Speaking of black groups, surely the most eccentrically talented were *The Four Blackbirds*, who not only sang novelty close-harmony, but were gifted mimics as well. They are heard in such cartoons as *Swing Wedding* (MGM), *Mother Goose Goes Hollywood* (Disney) and Warners' 1937 *Clean Pastures*, imitating the immortal entertainers Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway and Fats Waller. The latter cartoon is augmented by the Hall Johnson Choir whose rendition of *O, Dem Golden Slippers* and *Half of Me* are the equal of any choral work they performed in feature films of the period (such as

20th Century-Fox's *Banjo On My Knee* [1936]).

Often the voices in these trios and quartets would perform a solo piece that stood out; *The Sportsmen* performed, along with female vocalists, in the wonderful department store concert sequence in Freleng's 1940 *Little Blabbermouse*. When the *Half of Me* number reappears in this cartoon, the two voices belong to members of *The Sportsmen* who sing alternating stanzas - the beautiful top tenor of Bill Days is countered by the sepulchral bass of Thurl Ravenscroft.

Ravenscroft's chief "rival" was the strikingly similar Harry Stanton, one of that hardy band of approximately twenty freelance singers who toiled anonymously (but lucratively) for two decades in Hollywood chorus work. Certain singers, like Stanton and Abe Dinovitch (a.k.a. Abe Dinovitch) were actors and character voice people as well. Stanton is the wonderful, sonorous basso we hear narrating (in song) MGM's *Abdul, the Bulbul Ameer*, while Dinovitch's trick "frog" type voice supplied the talking trees in *The Wizard of Oz* at MGM, as well as popping up in cartoons like Columbia's *Bon Bon Parade*.

Novelty singers abounded in cartoons, including the cowboy comic Shug Fisher, calypso singer Sir Lancelot, and even Spike Jones' City Slickers co-founder Del Porter, who sings the catchy number *Up Jumped the Devil in a White Nightgown* in Walter Lantz's *Apple Andy* (1946).

Finally, one of the most famous groups from the western field - *The Sons of the Pioneers* - frequently augmented Warner cartoons of the late 1930's. They had a daily radio show at KFWB, Warner Brothers' own radio station,

Continued on Page 63



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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PHIL TIPPETT

HERE BE MONSTERS

by Stephen R. Bissette

In the annals of animation, there is a peculiar but remarkably evocative niche inhabited by a sometimes terrifying rogue's gallery. As noted on ancient maps of uncharted seas and islands, *Here Be Monsters*. Prominent among this grotesque menagerie is the patriarch of one Skull Island, King Kong, with his own Son at his right hand. On other mysterious islands, a Cyclops, a hydra, and a bronze giant Talos jealousy guard their respective treasures; on another, a progressive visionary named Nemo breeds outsized crustaceans, antediluvian fowl, and monstrous beehives. In South America, the inhabitants of The Lost World haunt an elevated jungle plateau. Gwangi rules over his own lost mesa, while over in Africa swings Mighty Joe Young. The irradiated Rhedosaurus swims from Arctic seas, reborn from violated icefields midwived by the Atomic Age, vanguard of a primordial army: an octopus demolishing the Golden Gate Bridge, scorpions scuttling from volcanic Mexican underworlds, a behemoth ravaging London, and more. Rocs, harpies, and Vermithrax Pejorative soar overhead, death-ray spewing flying saucers and rapid-gro Ymirs spill from the skies, while a dangerously unstable ED-209 patrols corporate-controlled Detroit.

This diversified menagerie share common creators who bring these creatures to life through the art of dimensional stop-motion animation. For over seventy years, audiences have been awestruck and entertained by the work of quiet, patient, and painstaking creators who have molded and animated the menagerie, frame by frame.

The public rarely concerns itself with the names of these cartographers of uncharted worlds, the alchemists who breathe life into clay, rubber, and steel-skeletoned golems. Willis O'Brien, Ray Harryhausen, and Jim Danforth are hardly household names,



Phil Tippett animates the dragon for *Dragonslayer* (1982). (© Tippett Studio)

much less Pete Peterson, Al Hamm, Gene Warren, David Pal, and the many other souls skilled in this rarified art. Indeed, Willis O'Brien, the granddaddy of the artform here in America, lived to see his offspring Kong misrepresented time and time again in the media whenever some aging nobody decided to steal newsprint columns claiming the title, "I Played King Kong."

More than any other in his field, Ray Harryhausen arguably earned a certain public affection and recognition as an artist, a stature reaffirmed by numerous industry and international awards Harryhausen has been honored with since he retired from filmmaking in 1981. Even as Harryhausen left the field, a bold new generation inspired by his own work was busy perfecting and pioneering new techniques.

Prominent among them was a young Californian named Phil Tippett.

Like many children of the Fifties (Tippett was born in Berkeley in 1951), Tippett was captivated by the fantastic creatures that inhabited *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), courtesy of special effects maestro Ray Harryhausen. Unlike most kids, Tippett carried his fascination further than an evening's entertainment at the Oaks Theater, prompting the budding artist to save up the money he

earned mowing lawns to pursue his own experiments with dimensional animation. In his teenage years, Tippett labored over his own amateur 8mm stop-motion creations.

By age 17, Tippett had mastered his craft well enough to land commercial animation assignments, pausing only to study at the University of California at Irvine. His first job was at Gene Warren and Wah Chang's venerable Projects Unlimited, animating a car for a trick shot in *Some Kind of a Nut* (1969).

After earning his Bachelor's Degree in art studies at UC, Tippett turned to TV commercial animation. During this period, he worked for minimum wages (then \$1.50 an hour) at Cascade Pictures (aka CPC), a studio specializing in the production of dimensional animation commercials, and freelanced for FilmFare, Creative Film Arts, and Excelsior Animated Moving Pictures, establishing relations with many other animators and effects technicians (1). Even while joining the ranks of animators to pop life into lovable little Poppin' Fresh, the Pillsbury Doughboy, Phil worked toward his goal of creating bigger-than-life monsters for feature films.

Though he labored with many friends and associates on a number of unrealized productions (see filmography), Tippett's first creature-



feature film credit was on *The Crater Lake Monster* (1977), a low-budget lake monster movie produced and directed by fellow Cascade alumni William Stromberg. The titular stop-motion animated character was sculpted in part by Phil, working with associate Jon Berg to complete the articulated plesiosaur model begun by lead animator David Allen. Tippet also animated the figure (along with Allen, Randy Cook, and Jim Danforth) in a precious few shots.

Tippet's next feature film work provided another fleeting moment or two of screen time, but it proved a more memorable showcase than the *Crater Lake Monster's* antics had, and was far more important to Phil's career. Based upon the recommendation of Cascade alumni Dennis Muren, Phil and Jon Berg joined the production team on George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) to design aliens for the famous cantina sequence. They also designed and animated the miniature chess game between Chewbacca and R2-D2, and, in a pinch, improvised the barely-glimpsed live-action eye-on-a-stalk monster lurking in the trashmasher. Thus began Tippet's ongoing affiliation with Lucas' influential Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) effects studio, creating both dimensionally stop-motion animated and occasional live-action creature effects.

Jon Berg left ILM after the completion of *Star Wars* to supervise special effects for Joe Dante's solo directorial debut, *Piranha* (1978). It was a typically impoverished Roger Corman production, but the John Sayles script and remarkable team effort elevated *Piranha* above Corman's usual fare. Phil and his wife Jules Roman joined Berg's team, working with a young Rob Bottin to sculpt the 26 mutant piranha models seen in the film. Tippet also created the delightful animated bipedal mudskipper creature seen in the lab (the garlike mutant visible in the same lab was a hand-puppet operated by Jules).

Tippet and Berg then returned to Lucasfilm and ILM to work on *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), creating the impressive stop-motion Imperial Walkers (designed by Joe Johnston, animated by Tippet, Berg, and Doug Beswick) for the Hoth snow battle sequence. They also crafted the live-action Wampa snow monster, another "knock-together" (in Berg's words) puppet, and Phil animated the Tauntaun in the opening scene. Crucial to their work on *Empire*, Tippet and Berg developed a technique to reduce the problem of strobing common to stop-motion animation, using computer-controlled motors to actually blur the motion of the manually-animated models during photography of individual frames. The strobe-

problem inherent in the stop-motion animation process is one Jim Danforth had tried to solve in *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth* (1971) with impressive results, but Tippet and his fellow animators were of a new generation, with higher budgets and new technologies at their disposal. *The Empire Strikes Back's* integration of stop-motion and live-action set a new standard, considerably enhanced by clever application of the motion-blur techniques.

These experiments proved successful enough for future refinement and application to the extensive animation effects showcased in *Dragonslayer* (1981), where the process was named Go-Motion. With Dennis Muren supervising effects, Tippet and fellow animator Ken Ralston (working with their respective teams) created 'Vermithrax Pejorative,' the most breathtaking dragon to strut, shamble, and soar across the screen since Harryhausen's own *7th Voyage of Sinbad*. *Dragonslayer's* star has only recently been bettered by his descendent Draco, the anthropomorphic talking dragon Tippet designed (but did not animate) for *Dragonheart* (1996), but the computer-generated Draco lacks the compelling and utterly convincing reptilian behavior and presence of Vermithrax. Tippet justifiably counts *Dragonslayer* among his finest accomplishments. Last year's remastered laserdisc reissue only reinforced its stature as a landmark in stop-motion animated features.

Often working with long-time associates Dennis Muren, Tom St. Amand, and others, Tippet continued working with Lucasfilm and ILM. Tippet worked on the bipedal Imperial Scout Walkers and the rod-puppet Rancor Pit monster in *Return of the Jedi* (1983); animated puppet effects for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984); animating the monstrous Borra for the made-for-TV *The Ewok Adventure* (1984), and the showstopper Lovecraftian monsters that sparked the climax of the otherwise dismal *Howard the Duck* (1986); and many, many more.

As Phil asserts in the following interview, though he continues to work in collaboration with ILM, he does not work for them, as all-too-

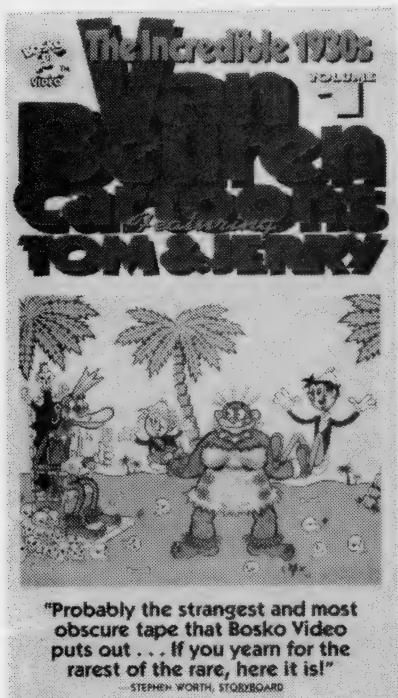
often assumed and misreported. Phil carefully maintained his own autonomy while nurturing the skills necessary to work with, and eventually lead, the concentrated team efforts required by ever more ambitious and exploratory effects work.

Among his accomplishments apart from ILM is his own short film, *Prehistoric Beast* (1984), which Phil shot entirely in his garage studio over two years. Footage from *Prehistoric Beast* was incorporated into Robert Guenette's CBS-TV special *Dinosaur!* (1985), by which time Phil's solo garage operation had grown into the fully-operational Tippet Studios team, completing even more dinosaur footage for the



Mark Hamill and Harrison Ford battle Tippet & Berg's garbage monster in *Star Wars*. (© 1977 20th Century-Fox)

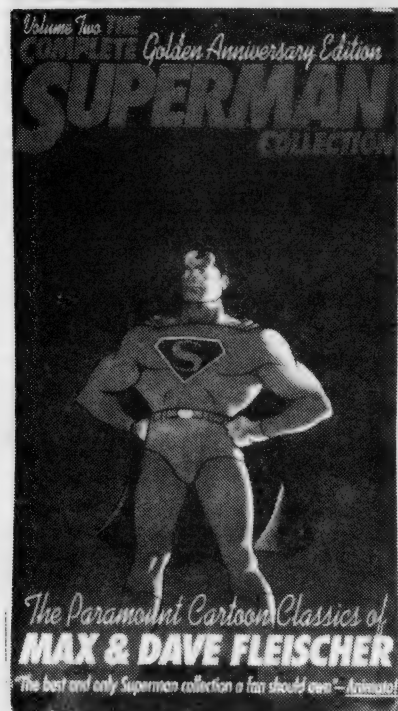
TV special. Integral to the initiation and growth of Tippet Studios were designer Craig Hayes and producer Jules Roman, along with a remarkable ensemble of fellow artists. Working with them, Tippet subsequently brought formidable spark to the ED-209 robot in Paul Verhoeven's *Robocop* (1987), the decidedly malicious title character of its sequel *Robocop 2* (1990), and others. In short order, Tippet Studio established its own reputation as a pioneer in a new era of special effects magic, breathing new life into dimensionally-animated creations



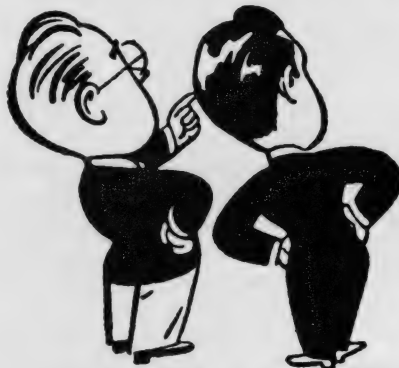
"Van Beuren Volume One" contains many rare gems not seen in almost 60 years. They feature two little guys, "Tom and Jerry." They contain ethnic stereotypes, which were prevalent in the 1930's. Titles are: "Wot a Night", "Trouble", "Jungle Jam", "A Swiss Trick", "Rocketeers", "Rabid Hunters", "In the Bag", "Pots and Pans", and "Grandfather's Clock", a part live-action cartoon. 70 Minutes - \$29.95

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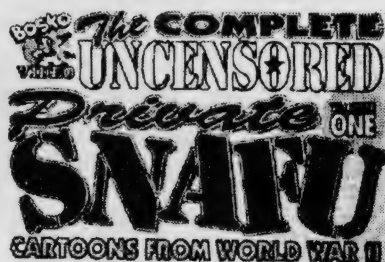
"Van Beuren Volume Three" contains eleven rare Little King cartoons. Titles are: "Dizzy Day", "AM to PM", "The Fatal Note", "5 Pats", "Jest of Honor", "Jolly Good Felons", "Sultan Pepper", "A Royal Good Time", "Art for Art's Sake", and "Cactus King". 84 Minutes - \$29.95



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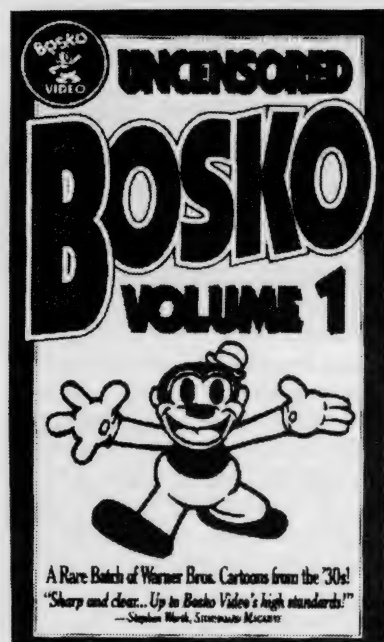
"Uncensored Pvt. Snafu Vol. 1" contains "Coming! Snafu!", "Gripes", "Spies", "The Goldbrick", "The Infantry Blues", "Fighting Tools", "The Home Front", "Rumors", "Booby Traps", "Snafuperman", "Snafu vs. Malaria Mike", "A Lecture on Camouflage", "Gas", and "Going Home". These rare films were made by Warner Bros. for the Armed Forces during WWII. These were animated by the great Warner directors, and voiced by Mel Blanc. 62 Minutes - \$29.95

"Uncensored Pvt. Snafu Vol. 2" contains "The Chow Hound", "Censored", "Outpost", "Payday", "Target Snafu", "A Few Quick Facts: Inflation", "Three Brothers", "In the Aleutians", "A Few Quick Facts: Fear", "It's Murder She Says", "Hot Spot", "Operation Snafu", "No Buddy Atoll", "Private Snafu Presents Seaman Tarfu". 73 Minutes - \$29.95

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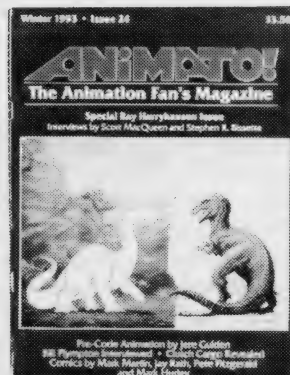
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Just as he worked within a team effort to perfect the application of computerized Go-Motion technologies to stop-motion animation, Phil found himself working with Dennis Muren and other long-time associates (including Craig Hayes, Jules Roman, Tom St. Amand, Bart Trickle, and others) on Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), midwiving the birth of another offspring of the stop-motion tradition.

This baby was of an entirely new, and more volatile, breed: computer-generated imagery, or CGI.

Tippett was initially engaged to apply Go-Motion animation and his dinosaur expertise to many of *Jurassic Park*'s crucial action sequences, but a breakthrough in CGI during production scrapped the traditional application of stop-motion techniques. At first glance, the new dimensional application of CGI seemed to mark the end of an era for its parent. Muren recalls Tippet's initial reaction to the breakthrough tests: "At one point he said, 'What do you need me for?' But we did need him. We needed what he had learned throughout the years about the behavior of these animals." Director Spielberg also urged Tippet to "take a step sideways and get involved in a completely different medium. He resisted at first, balked at the idea of working through computer keyboards," Spielberg noted. "I think he was mourning the loss of the hands-on artistry that he does better than anyone else in the world today. But he came on board very quickly when he saw what the end result could be." (2)

With Spielberg's and his old friend Muren's urging, Tippet overcame his initial feelings of shock to recognize the necessary applications of his skills and the stop-motion tradition to this upstart technology. Whereas originally Muren's team was intended to digitally enhance Tippet Studios' Go-Motion creations, the respective roles were reversed, with Tippet's dinosaur expertise and animation ultimately laying the strong foundation for the final CGI magic. Tippet became an essential participant in executing *Jurassic Park*'s trend-setting effects, choreographing key dinosaur sequences with stop-motion animatics produced at Tippet Studios over a four-month period. These animatics (some of which can be seen on side 2 of the laserdisc release of *The Making of Jurassic Park*) provided the essential blueprints for the fully-realized CGI effects, lending character, kinetics, and dramatic focus to the finished product. Poseable dinosaur models were built by Tippet Studios to aid the computer animators,

and Phil found himself taking on the role of teacher, engaging mimes to educate a new generation of animators on the basics of character animation through a further understanding their own bodies and behavior.

Together with Muren's team, Tippet Studio also developed a device which married the disciplines of stop-motion and CGI animation: a stop-motion armature electronically linked with the computer. Thus, the armature could be animated in the traditional hands-on frame-by-frame method, as its movements were translated directly into the computer's own simulated wire-frame model. Since the days when Willis O'Brien had hired Marcel Delgado to build his animation models for *The Lost World* and *King Kong*, stop-motion puppets were usually molded over carefully-articulated, precision-tooled metal armatures. This new technology still uses such armatures to provide the necessary foundation for animated characters, but the finished model is not made of foam rubber molded over the metal skeleton. In reality, the armature remains a bare metal jointed skeleton; instead, a CG dimensional simulcrum is digitally created over the computer's wire-frame translation of the armature. Except for its armature, the resulting "virtual" animation model does not physically exist in real space, but is capable of far subtler movements, surface textures, and incidental lifelike motion (breathing, muscular movement beneath the skin, weight shifting, etc.) than any actual animation model. Working with computer experts Thomas Williams and (from Pixar) Rick Sayre, Craig Hayes supervised Tippet Studios' responsibilities for the construction of the device, with Hayes, Tom St. Amand, and Bart Trickle successfully completing the armatures themselves. Using their new tools, the Tippet Studio team completed essential CGI animation for shots in two *Jurassic Park* sequences: the *Tyrannosaurus rex* attack on the road, and the *Velociraptors* stalking the children in the kitchen.

Whatever its flaws as a film, *Jurassic Park* clearly initiated a new era in the integration of live-action and dimensionally animated characters. Commenting on the impact the first screening of JP's rough-cut *Brachiosaurus* sequence, Tippet says, "I had tears in my eyes - because, for the first time, I could see a dinosaur. ... The shots really conveyed the beauty in the beasts. And they fulfilled what, as a five-year old child, I really wanted to see." He concluded, "I guess now that *Jurassic Park* is over, I can get out of this business. I have

fulfilled that five-year-old's directive — now I can move on to adolescence." (3)

Thankfully, Phil has not chosen to retire, choosing instead to embrace the new technologies and continue to shape his own destiny. It is a shared destiny with all the other artists and associates who continue to work at Tippet Studios, jointly exploring the "adolescence" of a tradition, a medium, and their individual and collective paths as artists. And make no mistake: the artists are still essential and in charge. As an artist, Phil himself provides the essential bridge between the history, techniques, and hard-won experience of the traditional stop-motion animation process, and the new tools, potential, and applications of CGI.

As Phil describes the process in the following interview, the new "toolkit" CGI provides has its own possibilities — and limitations. Ever the pragmatist in his own particular realm of cinematic miracles, Phil is supervising his Studio's exploratory and experiential work with CGI one project at a time. Recognizing the direct-to-video nature of *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* (1996) would provide an ideal vehicle to stretch the Studio muscles in a format that would be more forgiving than the expanse of a theatrical screen, Phil accepted the job. Tippet Studio created a dozen startling CGI shots of *Tremors 2*'s ravenous monster brood.

Tippet's relationship with *Tremors* co-creator and *Tremors 2* director Steve S. Wilson has its roots in Phil's early years: as a writer for the magazine *Cinefantastique* in the late 1970's, Wilson (who already had a student film to his credit. *Recorded Live*, made in 1975 using stop-motion effects) covered Tippet's earliest accomplishments.

It was my great pleasure to enjoy a conversation with Phil about his work, past and present. Having completed design work for Rob Cohen's fantasy *Dragonheart*, Tippet Studio is currently up to its eyeballs creating a variety of effects for *Starship Troopers*. Though I have no doubt I was intruding into an overwhelming work schedule, Phil was very giving of his time, sparing forty minutes to patiently discuss and explain aspects of his life's work to yet another curious layman.

As I trust the reader has already noted, Phil continues to value and work with many longtime associates, demonstrating a passion for human relations that is at least equal to his passion for breathing life into decidedly nonhuman critters. He is teaching, training, and working with the



next generation of monster makers, and there is no telling what wonders they will be capable of.

Impressive as the new breed of CGI characters are, they have yet to demonstrate the scope and heart that fixed *King Kong* in the popular iconography. Give them time. It was Kong's creators, and the context he existed within, that gave him such mythic life.

Like Willis O'Brien and Ray Harryhausen before him, Phil has the heart, the imagination, the skill, and the experience. He has built a studio to breathe life into more characters worthy of Kong's legacy. They will come spilling out of Tippett Studio and into that marvelous pantheon inhabited by Kong, Mighty Joe Young, the Ymir, the Cyclops, and Vermithrax Pejorative.

I, for one, cannot wait to meet them.

(1) Among the many effects technicians who worked at, and/or got their start with, Cascade were David Allen, Dennis Muren (who already had *Equinox*, *Flesh Gordon*, and *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* to his credit), Tom St. Amand, Bill Hedge, and William R. Stromberg (animator at Clokey's *Davey and Goliath* series, soon to produce and direct *The Crater Lake Monster*), and many others.

(2) Muren and Spielberg are quoted from *The Beauty in the Beasts* by Jody Duncan, *Cinefex* #55, August, 1993, page 56.

(3) Quoted from Duncan, *Ibid.*, page 67

THE PHIL TIPPETT INTERVIEW

Steve Bissette: What were your influences as an artist, in terms of cinema and the graphic arts?

Phil Tippett: My interest really peaked as a child watching *King Kong* on television, and going to see *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*. My father is an artist, so there were always a great deal of books on picture-making around. I went to a lot of movies, and looked at a lot of books on painting and drew a lot and sculpted a lot. It's just as natural for me as breathing, I just sort of grew up doing that stuff.

In terms of movies, there are two that are meaningful to me: the original RKO *King Kong*, and *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*.

SB: Any favorite animated features?

PT: You mean in terms of cartoon animation, or puppet films?

SB: Yes —

PT: You know, for some strange, unknown, mysterious reason, I have never particularly been drawn to 2D or cartoon work. Even as a child, I was never particularly enamored or impressed with it, but I always have liked all the 3D type work, so I've got a soft spot for that stuff: *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, I'm really looking forward to *James and the Giant Peach*, and I really like *Toy Story* a lot. I include that in the tradition of the puppet film, which it really was. The fact that it was made by computers means nothing to me. It falls within that genre, and I really enjoy it. I liked all those Karel Zeman pictures, *Baron Munchausen* and so on.

SB: Zeman's films are marvelous. Do you feel any kinship with, or draw inspiration from, surrealist animators like Jan Svankmajer, The Brothers Quay, or Ladislav Starevich? Or is that just too far apart from what you're doing?

PT: It's pretty far apart. I enjoy all their work immensely. I'm a tremendous fan of Svankmajer's filmmaking, whether it's animated or not. But they're pretty mutually exclusive worlds, as are even the nearby studios like Skellington Productions [Inc.] and Pixar. One specializes in conventional stop-motion,

the other cutting-edge CGI work, but they're pretty much what I would put in category of the puppet film. That's extremely different from what we do, in that they're creating an entire universe, and once you have established the universe — which is a very time-consuming, art-directed, difficult thing to do — once you establish that universe, you're free to play around in it.

The kind of work that we do here is different, since we're primarily matching to other live-action components that we're collaging our images into. The live-action is shot in natural or studio settings, and the lighting has to be matched, along with the action of the live-action performers that are usually integrated into these shots; they are walking around under a specific gravity, so your characters really need to have a very specific physical presence and feeling to them. In many ways, there are a lot of technical performance issues that you have to address before you can even begin to have fun or play around with a character or specific action.

SB: I know it's a bit like asking which of your kids you like the best, but are there any characters or sequences you're particularly fond of in your body of work?



Tippett's early work included animating the Tauntaun in *The Empire Strikes Back*. (©Lucasfilm Ltd. 1980, All Rights Reserved)



PT: I like some of the Walker sequences in the *Star Wars* films, and the *Robocop* ED-209 sequences. I'm fond of the blocking and the direction of all those. Certainly, some of the sequences in *Jurassic Park*, I'm really happy with. The super-low-budget CBS *Dinosaur!* project, I like some aspects of that quite a bit.

SB: That was tremendous! Some of that — the sequence with the *Tyrannosaurus rex* battling the ceratopsian — also appeared in one of the recent animation festival anthologies as *Prehistoric Beast*. I thought that was the best stop-motion dinosaur animation, bar none, I've ever seen in my life.

PT: Thank you.

SB: Any chance we'll ever see a feature-length wall-to-wall Phil Tippett dinosaur extravaganza like that in the future?

PT: No, I seriously doubt it. Actually, *Prehistoric Beast* was an entire short film that I had made a number of years prior to the CBS *Dinosaur!* show, which is what convinced the producers to go ahead and make that. I seriously doubt you'll see more. I was engaged for a number of years in association with Paul Verhoeven and Jon Davison, the director and producer of *Robocop* (I'm now currently working with them on this *Starship Troopers* project) and Walon Green* wrote the screenplay for a phantasmagorical epic dinosaur picture that we developed at Disney over a two-year period. Since then we have all moved on, and Disney is turning that into their own version of what we initially had in mind. That was something I was very involved with for some time that, in the next few years, may come out, but I don't know exactly what...I think Disney is planning on this thing being one of their first big computer graphics efforts. We'll see.

[*Note: Walon Green is a renowned screenwriter (*The Wild Bunch*, etc.), producer and director (*The Hellstrom Chronicle*, etc.).]

SB: *Jurassic Park* was both a traumatic event and a dramatic new beginning for you as an artist. What did you go through emotionally during that production?

PT: Well, of course, the big difficulty in transition was becoming familiar with the digital technology, and applying all of the foundation knowledge we had to the new technology. That was a difficult transition in that the new 'junk' is really complicated. Beyond that, the difficulty is really applying your knowledge, the needs of the production, and the understanding of what the genre requires into a whole new method of

making things that is not particularly friendly to that.

Up until now, a lot of the cinematic genres co-evolved with the technology that was available. As late as five years ago, basically, glass shots and rear screen and blue screen composites and miniatures — the techniques that go all the way back to [Georges] Méliès — were part of the toolkit. All of a sudden, the toolkit is thrown out, and there's a whole new thing. The new thing certainly had applications that we're still, every single day, working on the limitations of the digital technology to allow us to get back to some of the freedoms and the hands-on direct experience that working with things in real space gives you. It was a very difficult challenge in that degree. It wasn't so difficult for me in that I had been working more in a directorial, or a design, aspect prior to that. I had been used to working with groups of people, which I've come to believe is what movie-making is all about. It's a team effort, so I've turned into more of a team leader than actually a practitioner.

SB: Do you still see yourself as an artist, or have the necessities of managing a studio pushed you away from the joys of hands-on personal creativity with this work?

PT: I'm still very much involved — certainly not in a "hands-on" way, but I'm not a manager as much as I am art director, choreographer, something like that. Now I find that there are so many people out there that are young and enthusiastic and are a lot better than I ever was with this stuff, I find myself in a new position. I have a lot more fun watching people develop interesting shots, and bring stuff to life now than I did when I actually had to do it myself.

SB: Those people are doing extraordinary work because they had your work to build upon. Do you see yourself at a generational shift here?

PT: I'm beginning to, more and more. The people that I'm working with are younger and younger all the time.

The philosophy for my studio — let me clarify one thing. I don't work at or for ILM. I have my own studio, and have for the last fifteen years. I've worked on and off in various associations with ILM, but my methodologies and the way I go about actually making things is very different from a lot of visual effects studios.

My emphasis has always been on this hybrid of animation and visual effects, before anything else. ILM was the one visual effects company that dabbled, in varying degrees, with

character and creature-type things. They had certainly been getting, more and more and more, into that aspect of things, but intrinsically coming from a visual effects position. Our studio here really emphasizes the performance aspect of these kinds of films. To that end, we do a lot of teaching. I teach people coming up through the ranks how to approach, once again, these kinds of films, which are a specific kind of pictures — as distinguished from other pictures that use visual effects for production design, or from the historical vantage point: you know, the glass shot, the matte shot, the high-speed miniature explosion kind of thing —

SB: Right. Your kind of film instead builds a specific fantasy universe, with fantastic creatures or beings interacting with live-action elements—

PT: There is a particular historical approach within visual effects that has grown from the production design department, really: the scenic side of things. Then, there's the other that co-evolved with Willis O'Brien on into Ray Harryhausen, that developed this character-generation side of things that were integrated into photographically-representational backgrounds, as opposed to the more traditional puppet film. They do occupy a very distinctive niche. It's very specific.

The effort that it takes to get the understanding across to the crew isn't always the easiest thing to do in another studio context. I've found it much more satisfying here, in our own environment. It really depends which end, head or tail, wags the dog [laughs]; from this end, it's animation, before everything else. It's not "the bottom line." We really choose our projects on the basis of interest, not exclusively financial issues; nor does it come from a very strong photographic effects or technical position, as a number of other studios might. Ours is a very different orientation.

SB: What have you been able to retain of the more tactile, hands-on interaction with your models and your puppets that you used to enjoy? Or do you miss that?

PT: Since I work with a number of different kinds of craftspeople and artists, at least in terms of the animation side of things, I'm more than happy to let the practitioners of the craft choose whatever weapon they want, as long as they're able to deliver the goods with it. I'm more than comfortable to work with conventional or traditional computer graphics animators.

I do believe in working in the real world a lot. Craig Hayes (one of the co-owners of our



A size comparison used in designing the dragon from *Dragonheart*
(Courtesy Tippett Studios)

company and our lead designer) is instrumental in designing and constructing these input devices that we developed on *Jurassic Park*, and that we have continued to develop in our other projects - it's kind of a motion-capture, basic stop-motion armature that allows puppeteers or animators to go and physically manipulate the props in real space and sometimes real time.

SB: Your animated characters then have to interact with the live-action actors in space and time, or have the illusion of doing so. Ray Harryhausen often mentioned how Kerwin Mathews was better than most actors at "shadow-acting," interacting with creatures that weren't there at all while filming the live-action. With a whole generation or two of actors who've grown up with the kind of films Harryhausen and you have made, do you find today's actors more willing, or a little more skillful, at that kind of "shadow-boxing?"

PT: Most actors are pretty resilient and willing to do what they're told by their director. There's a number of techniques that have been developed over the years that we employ quite a bit, successfully, that help galvanize the crews and the actors. It's always a bit of a thing to make sure you get the proper eye-line, but if you know

what eye-line you're looking for from an actor, it's not that difficult to get them to fix on some object and distance and maintain their gaze, or give them counts that allows them to turn their heads in some prescribed period of time that will allow you to match them to the character you're putting in later on.

There are also quite a few tools. One that George [Lucas] used quite extensively in the *Star Wars* films were the animatics: with G.I. Joes, coat hangers, little dolls and sticks, we used to produce these "place holders" that allowed for the editorial continuity in the *Star Wars* pictures. They're very, very quick video images that were captured that allowed for the continuity and the blocking of the basic ideas. Since then we've gone on to develop more and more sophisticated choreographies for some of these sequences. We did a great deal to galvanize the continuity between the full-scale dinosaur props that Stan Winston made, and the computer graphic animations that we produced at my studio, that ILM composited for the main road and the raptor sequences in *Jurassic Park*. Recently, my studio designed the lead character for *Dragonheart*, and produced a series of animatics that blocked the first couple of sequences of the movie out. Rob Cohen, the

director, was somewhat new to working on special effects movies. We based a number of these more sophisticated "moving storyboards" on his storyboards, and that blocks and fleshes out the entire action. It shows what the character you have designed could do, and what it could be, and it really takes the whole pre-visualization process a lot further.

It's very, very useful to show the actors - particularly if they're children - what they should be doing. It also helps to galvanize the whole crew, in terms of photography and production designers, everybody.

SB: My friend Frank Miller scripted *Robocop 2* and 3. The way he described work on *Robocop 2* in particular, there was a lot of interaction with you and your studio right up to the final cut. How extensively do you work with the directors on the features you've had significant involvement with, as opposed to those where you're just doing a sequence or two?

PT: It's a very direct involvement: we work side-by-side in the whole preproduction phase, many times working side-by-side with the writer in developing the material. The writer doesn't always know what the thing can do, or should do, or might not pick the right character for a number of things. You're creating a fantasy character that nobody's ever seen before, so what the capabilities are that have yet to be realized, I don't even know, exactly, in terms of what the character can do. So, you're working in shaping the material, and/or involved in the storyboarding process, and editorializing those. Then going on location and working on every single shot, blocking it and setting it up with the director to make sure that once we get it back in the studio, it's all going to work and have editorial continuity. After all that, the work really begins.

We usually work right up to the very last moment. We usually drive the sound people crazy, adding shots at the last minute. We're usually on the projects for the entire run of the show.

SB: *Robocop 2* was a pretty gruesome film. Do you have any qualms about working with such explicit material and imagery?

PT: Ya, particularly if the film isn't any good. I think the first *Robocop* was exceptionally violent, but the violence fit the picture. Paul [Verhoeven]'s use of violence is to not pull any stops out to try to glorify or make violence "cute." The horrific assassination of the main character is poignant and means something; a very graphic "crucifixion" was the whole point



The new mutant "graboids" animated by the Tippett Studios from *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*

of the main story. But in *Robocop 2*, I think there was just a lot of really nasty, cruel stuff that made me sick, that I wasn't too happy with. It is always disappointing to put that level of effort and work into something that not only is unnecessarily cruel, but isn't completely worked out in terms of a story, an idea, or a movie.

That was one of these things where the studio wanted to turn around a sequel really quickly that was called *Robocop 2*. [Director] Irvin Kershner came on literally a month before production started, and Frank was still slogging out the story ideas - [laughs] we just started making the movie! Well, *Robocop 2* is kind of what you end up with.

SB: Stop-motion usually requires extensive pre-planning, months, even years, in advance. Do you have to do the same kind of pre-planning with computer graphics, or is there a little more room for spontaneous invention?

PT: Well, the pre-planning you have to do on any theatrical feature production is still pretty much the same. It doesn't really matter what kind of tool you use.

Once the production issues are resolved, though, the studio problems are significantly different. You're setting up a entire network just to deal with all of the information that goes back and forth: these huge picture files. Just the

rendering time that it takes to make images out of these very complicated models is a big infrastructure problem. So, to that end, it's significantly more complicated than it was just having a stage that you could clear out and put a couple black flats around, hoist a couple of lights, and put down a table top and a camera. That's very direct and concrete. The whole computer graphics experience really necessitates a complete studio-type setup.

SB: For *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*, your studio created entirely computer-generated shots of the new, bipedal *Tremors* creatures. Did you choose to work on the sequel, or did it choose you, so to speak?

PT: It kind of came about...Steve Wilson and Nancy Roberts, the director and producer of the film, had been trying to develop the idea for a number of years. They had come up for a few visits to my studio. One of those visits happened to coincide with our finishing up on *Jurassic Park*, and we were looking for a project that would be our next step into actually putting together not just the animations and direction for the characters, but actually producing the images. Steve and Nancy came along, and everyone at the studio were fans of the first film, so Craig Hayes designed this strange little

insectoid creature. We shot a number of background plates and produced two or three shots with this little character running around that Steve and Nancy then used, going back to Universal to help sell the project. About a year and a half later, we found ourselves being asked to come on board and work on the project, which we were happy to do.

SB: Once you were on board, did your studio have further input on the creature designs, or were you working from pre-approved designs?

PT: Not in this particular context. We were very much involved at that point in a theatrical feature, *Three Wishes*, that required a bit of computer graphics character and effects work from us. We were able to take the *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* shot on because it was being made for television, direct release to video. We were able to work at a much lower resolution. A number of the criteria and conditions were such that the shots weren't overly complicated, in that they were shot from certain angles and had certain requirements so we knew they were producible. Steve was very careful about how he structured

the action of the sequences. We were involved with only a handful of shots - I think we did fourteen shots, each of them three to five seconds long.

SB: In the promo reel for *Aftershocks*, you mention that the great advantage of computer-generated imagery is that you're freed from the limitations of the material world. Earlier you mentioned the limitation of computer graphics. What kind of tightrope are you walking there?

PT: One is expense. Computer graphics are incredibly expensive. The other is the talent pool; finding people that are capable of working in this medium. Once you're able to solve those initial problems and the litany of other technical issues that come along with a device where you can do everything from wash your socks to raise bread, everything's supposed to be able to be done in the computer, so all of the engineering problems need to be executed by pretty sophisticated programmers and computer folks.

Once you get over those hurdles - which you never really completely get over because every shot has different requirements - then you're able to play around or manipulate three-dimensional models with the same plasticity that you can on the two-dimensional plane. Once you're able to do that, you can treat 3D



objects with a great deal more freedom than previously we've had.

A big consideration with a miniature or a model is how you support the character, and the support is a tremendous engineering problem, because you have to go to great lengths to remove these supports or rods and then tie the character fluidly into an environment. Of course, in the computer, there are no constraints at all. You can move the character any way you want to - squash, or bounce, or add some weight.

Another tremendous advantage is its primary function as an editorial tool. It's unlike conventional stop-motion animation, where a tremendous amount of effort and planning and concentration goes into a shot, but if for any reason something terrible happens during the course of the shot, you're forced to shoot the whole thing over again. If there's a little technical glitch, or if your memory strays for a little bit, the whole shot needs to be redone. With the computer work, you can go back and refine the work forever [laughs].

SB: So putting a lid on it must be one of the difficulties!

PT: Ya, it isn't with a good animator.

SB: Concerning the expense you mentioned, I'm curious: on a modestly-budgeted film like *Tremors 2: Aftershocks*, is the computer work less expensive to execute than comparable stop-motion animation would be?

PT: You know, in that case, it really probably was because you were dealing with multiple characters. To get into the kinds of timings, complexities, and blue-screening composites that one would need to do conventionally, and because of the fact that it was all at television resolution, it allowed us to get away with quite a bit. So, I think it was pretty significantly less expensive.

SB: Stop-motion animation always has its own sort of "reality," whether it was the complex work you were doing on a film like *Dragonslayer*, or looking back at the pioneer efforts like *King Kong*. Do you think that computer graphics integrate more fully, more believably into live action?

PT: I don't think so. It really depends upon the context. The computer graphics have a hell of a time accepting being lit in daylight situations. With most artificial situations, I think, it's a lot easier to find all the right nuances and balances that allow you to light a character properly.

At this point in time, it's a strange trade-off. I believe that the kinds of advantages you

can gain in terms of fluidity and motion-blur and depending upon how careful you are, the kind of surface textures and modelling you're able to do on the characters, can really yield some striking results. But it is in its infancy. I think that you see in most CG shows, there are artifacts. It occurs in *Jurassic Park*: there are artifacts. The more the technology becomes familiar to people, the more they're going to be able to put names to what these artifacts are, like with stop-motion and its jerky quality. That was not visible to the lion's share of the public, say, when *The Lost World* was released [in 1925].

SB: Right, it was a learned response on the part of audiences, given time and more exposure to stop-motion animation effects.

PT: Ya. I see the same thing with computer graphics. It has its own particular look. A great deal of what we've done is to try and overcome the material, and the impediments of the tool. That's of course what a craftsman is always striving towards, to figure out the best use of the tool.

Computer graphics is very much in its infancy. You just don't have the feeling that these things that we're animating are real, concrete objects. They look some kind of strange, three-dimensional cartoon.

SB: With *Dragonslayer*, *Willow*, and now *Dragonheart*, how do you approach "breaking the mold" on traditional mythical archetypes when you're sitting down and redesigning these creatures?

PT: On the one hand, you keep what you've done in the past in mind. On the other, you read the screenplay and talk to the director and see what the director has in mind, what's called for in the character. Most times that really establishes the difference, and you just take off from there. As you go through these things, it's very clear that, with the design we did for *Dragonheart*, we didn't want to repeat any of the motifs that we used for *Dragonslayer*, so we just didn't. It wasn't that big of a problem. We just made sure we didn't repeat ourselves.

SB: What kind of creatures will we see in *Dragonheart*?

PT: Well, the lead character is a dragon called Draco. He's a forty or fifty-foot long, very elegant dragon, whose voice is done by Sean Connery. It should be fun.

SB: Ah, one of those strange, three-dimensional cartoons! So you had to wrestle with the problems of lip-synching Draco?

PT: No, well, we had to be concerned with the physical problem in the design of the character. We designed the character, and then created these animatics: the basic blocking of what the character could do. Then ILM built the computer graphic model, and are doing the animation and compositing effects that are being used in the movie. Our involvement in *Dragonheart* was a preproduction involvement in primary design issues.

SB: Any mythical creatures you haven't had a chance to tackle yet that you'd like to?

PT: You know, everything's been robots and space for quite a while now. It's been nice to go back to dragons and play with that in a more fantasy-oriented genre. It would be nice to do something more fantasy oriented for a while.

The dinosaurs are very interesting - *Jurassic Park* gave us license to really do some pretty serious reconstructions of what we thought these things really should be like, even though there were scale changes for dramatic purposes, maybe adding a little bit more weight here and there to "puff them up" a little bit. It was a pretty satisfying exercise in seeing how all the joints really worked together, and how, pose for pose, the creatures could look like in documentary-type settings. Doing things like that are satisfying to a certain degree, but I would like to work on a full-blown fantasy picture, a Ray Harryhausen kind of thing.

SB: Ray Harryhausen was usually the catalyst, the *initiator*, of his films. He worked on his films as co-producer and co-creator from scratch, from conception through all stages of preplanning and scripting, on to the final cut. Is that still feasible for an animation effects artist in today's Hollywood?

PT: I think it's possible, if all of the contingencies line up. I think the fact that Ray and [Charles] Schnee were able to produce their movies in the 1950's was the result of finding a certain audience, a certain level of breakdown in the studio system itself, that allowed these guys to get out from under the restrictions. Not having to work directly at Columbia, going over and setting their shop up in England to work "hiding out."

Today, the tremendous expense of these shows, in a large-scale context, really necessitates huge studio involvement. It's all very much script-contingent. The problem with a lot of these big epics or space operas, these huge productions, is that they are written to be very grand, big summer blockbuster movies that are directed by Steven Spielberg and Paul



PHIL TIPPETT & TIPPETT STUDIO FILMOGRAPHY:

Early work on unrealized projects includes David Allen's *The Primevals* (1976-77, model sculpture and casting), Jim Danforth's *Timegate* (1977, model sculpture); Bill Hedge & Nick Seldon's *Snails* (1977-78?, sculpted model maquette, appeared as actor in effects test footage).

Some Kind of A Nut

(1969; minor animation work in one shot only)

The Crater Lake Monster (1977)

Star Wars (1977)

Piranha (1978)

The Empire Strikes Back (1980)

Dragonslayer (1981)

Return of the Jedi (1983)

Prehistoric Beast (1983-84)

(excerpt featured in *The Tournee of Animation*, 1993, on video as *International Tournee of Animation Vol. 6*, 1994)

The Ewok Adventure

(TV, 11/25/84; foreign theatrical title: *Ewoks: Caravan of Courage*)

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom (1984)

Dinosaur! (1985)

(TV, original broadcast date unknown; incorporates footage from *Prehistoric Beast*)

Ewoks: The Battle for Endor (TV, 11/24/85)

Howard the Duck (1986)

The Golden Child (1986)

Robocop (1987)

Willow (1988)

Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989)

Ghostbusters 2 (1989)

Robocop 2 (1990)

Robocop 3 (1991)

Coneheads (1993)

Jurassic Park (1993)

Three Wishes (1995)

Tremors 2: Aftershocks (direct to video, 1996)

Dragonheart (1996)

Starship Troopers (in production for 1997)

Verhoeven. These guys really want every single nickel and dime to show up on the screen, and they're viewed as big-budgeted Hollywood movies. There are certainly ways, methods, techniques and ideas that aren't nearly as grand, but still are a whole lot of fun, that are possible to produce, I do believe. It takes convincing a studio to put their dough behind it. If you can do it for the right price, I think that possibility certainly exists. People do it all the time.

SB: Any unrealized or dream projects you hope to tackle in the near future?

PT: Absolutely, a number of them. We've been developing our studio here and getting it up to capacity of being a fully-functioning production entity. There are a number of projects, just like we were talking about, I would like to try and realize here. Some live-action fantasy-oriented projects, things like Pixar is doing. There's a number of projects that we've got on the drawing board and in script development.

SB: Phil, I look forward to seeing them. Thanks for your time.

PT: My pleasure.



Author's Note: This interview was conducted on March 20, 1996, prior to the release of *Tremors 2: Aftershocks* and *Dragonheart*

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Comic book creator, film historian, and media critic Stephen R. Bissette is a frequent contributor to ANIMATO! and is the creator of *Tyrant*, available at comic book shops everywhere.

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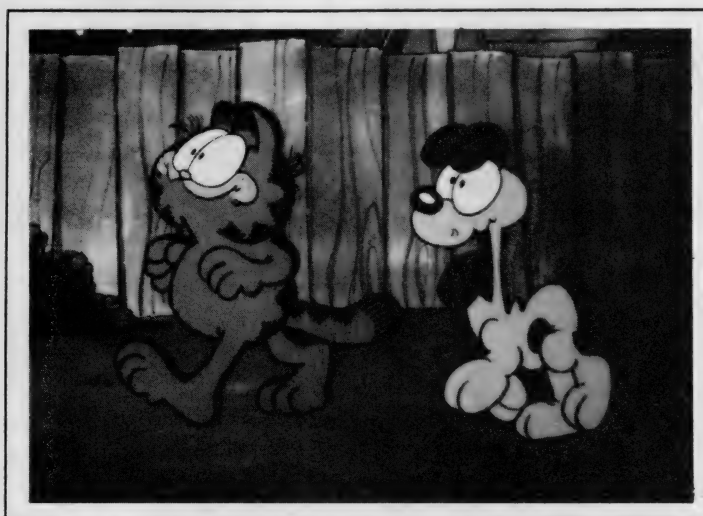
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An Arabian Knight-mare

*The story of Richard Williams' epic film **The Thief and The Cobbler** is a cautionary tale for all creators*

by G. Michael Dobbs

The recent cancellation of plans to release the 1995 Miramax film *Arabian Knight* on home video is the latest sad twist in the history of Richard Williams' *The Thief and The Cobbler*. The award-winning Canadian animator had been working on his dream project for almost 30 years only to see the film completed and substantially altered by others. Now animation fans won't even have the opportunity to see what *did* remain of Williams' vision. At a time when almost every G-rated animated film priced at \$20.00 or less is snapped up by parents, the decision to indefinitely postpone the video release makes no economic sense for Miramax and its parent company, Disney. But then, much about this production makes little sense.

The history of live-action motion pictures is filled with examples of films which have been abandoned before completion (Von Sternberg's *I Claudius*, Welles' *It's All True*) and films that were severely altered by distributors (Gilliam's *Brazil*, Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons*). Animation, though, has seldom had these kind of stories. The nature of the process of producing commercial animation is one of careful planning. Commercial animation has seldom ever had the kind of wheeling and dealing that has characterized live-action film production. *The Thief and The Cobbler* is an exception.

The animated feature *Arabian Knight* was released with little fanfare by Miramax Films last summer. There was no mention that the film was the brainchild of the man who directed the animation for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, and one easily could conclude the film was some sort of cheap knock-off of Disney's *Aladdin*. Hardcore animation fans recognized the film for what it really was, the much-delayed *The Thief and The Cobbler*.

This is a story with no winners, as the outcome is that Williams' prize project will never be seen as he intended, the reputation of an animation professional has been shredded, and another non-Disney animated feature has died at the box-office.

Richard Williams is a bit of a conundrum. His work has won an Oscar and an Emmy, and although he was the animation director for *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, he has little name value to the general public. A Canadian who went to Great Britain with animation producer George Dunning in the mid-Fifties, Williams set up his own studio in 1958 and produced animation for commercials and independent shorts.

His big break came when he was selected to produce animated titles for *The Charge of the Light Brigade* in 1968. His production of *A Christmas Carol* received the Academy Award in 1972. Williams became better known to American audiences through the fantastic shorts that made up the titles for the revived Pink Panther series in the mid-Seventies.

Williams began work on *T&C* in 1964 when he had planned to do a film about a children's book character named Mulla Nasruddin. Williams had already provided the illustrations for the book. An early reference to the project came in the 1968 *International Film Guide*. Williams received great praise that year for his title animation work in films such as *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the*

Forum and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The book notes that Williams was about to begin work on "the first of several films based on the stories featuring Mulla Nasruddin."

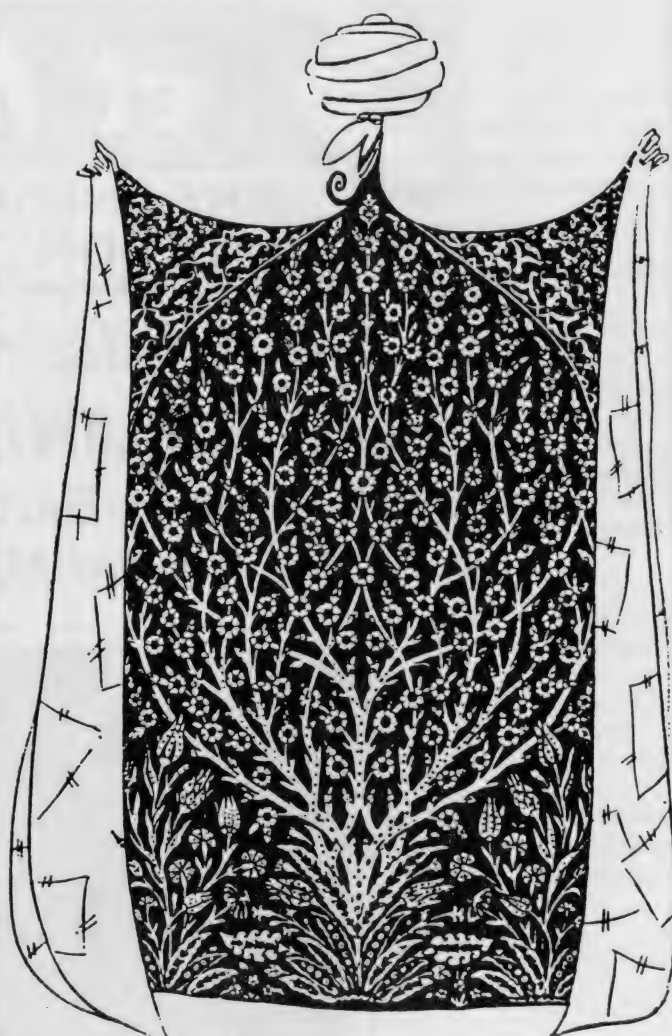
Like director Orson Welles, Williams would take on an outside assignment in order to put money into his own project, so work went slowly on his film as reflected by subsequent editions of the *International Film Guide*. In 1969, the *Guide* noted that animation legend Ken Harris was now working on the project which was now entitled *Mulla Nasrudin*. The illustrations from the film show impressive and intricate Indian and Persian designs.

In 1970, the project was re-titled *The Majestic Fool* and for the first time, a distributor for the independent film was mentioned, British Lion. The *International Film Guide* noted that due to the increase in production for the small

studio, the staff had increased to 40 people.

The Academy Award Williams won for *A Christmas Carol* undoubtedly strengthened his position in completing his feature which was now being referred as *Nasruddin!*. He began recording the dialogue tracks for the film, and hired Vincent Price to perform the voice of the villain, Anwar (later re-named Zigzag).

The whole focus of the film, though, was about to be changed. In a promotional booklet released in 1973, it was announced that Williams apparently decided that "Nasruddin" was found to be too verbal and not suitable for animation, therefore Nasruddin as a character and the Nasruddin stories were dropped as a project. However, the many years work spent on painstaking research into the beauty of Oriental art has been retained. Loosely based on elements in the *Arabian Nights* stories, an entirely new



An early drawing of the first hero of Williams' film, Mulla Nasruddin. (Courtesy of Luke Menichelli)



Zigzag and King Nod. Note the rings on Zigzag's fingers; a detail which must have caused the animators a little concern! (© Miramax Films 1995)

and original film entitled *The Thief and The Cobbler* is now the main project of the Williams Studio. Therefore any publicity references to the old character of Nasruddin are now obsolete."

Like many publicity releases, this one didn't tell the whole story. The writer failed to mention that while Nasruddin was out, "old" footage and characters were indeed being retained. Price's Anwar/Zigzag, the Thief himself, and the elderly nurse to the princess were all being carried over to the "new" film which Williams was promising would be a "100 minute Panavision animated epic feature film with a hand drawn cast of thousands." Sequences from the old film which made it into Williams' new film included the camel laughing at the Thief at the waterhole, the wounded soldier riding to tell the Golden City of the news of the One Eyes, and the princess' nanny beating the Thief up when he tried to steal her bananas.

For the next several years, Williams continued to work on the film while completing commercial assignments. He recorded a number of British actors performing various voices during this period.

In an effort to become "bankable" (his word), Williams took on what was supposed to be the part-time job of supervising a new feature film based on the Raggedy Ann and Andy stories. Originally Williams' contract called on him to work two weeks out of every month, an arrangement he later described to animation historian Milt Gray in *Funnyworld* as "silly."

The Raggedy Ann film proved to be a nightmare for Williams. While he was being made responsible for the film, he had little control over the production which was being bankrolled by the publishers of the original

stories and its parent company ITT. He was later removed from the final stages of production, but received most of the blame for the film's box office failure.

During the production of *Raggedy Ann*, Williams received a fair amount of publicity and in an interview with John Canemaker in the Feb. 1976 issue of *Millimeter*, he gave a hint about his vision for *T&C*. "The Thief is not following the Disney route. It's to my knowledge the first animated film with a real plot that locks together like a detective story at the end. It has no sentiment and the two main characters don't speak. It's like a silent movie with a lot of sound."

A radical approach to be sure, but one must consider the animation scene at the time. The Disney Studio was still floundering from the loss of its founder, and the animated films which had stirred the imagination of the critics and audiences were definitely not Disney. Williams' old boss George Dunning had directed *The Yellow Submarine* to acclaim and Ralph Bakshi's violent, profane and highly personal film *Heavy Traffic* hadn't just made money, it was accepted with a fair bit of hoopla into the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. This indeed was the time for yet another approach.

For the time, though, the pattern continued of Williams funding his film with outside jobs, while he refined his vision of the project.

A little light was seen at the end of the tunnel when trade ads appeared announcing that veteran Hollywood producer Gary Kurtz had teamed up with Williams to complete the film. The ads announced that *The Thief Who Never Gave Up* would be released in Christmas 1986, but, of course, it wasn't.

Williams did meet the man in 1986, though, who would bring the film to the screen. Producer Jake Eberts, whose company had financed films such as *Dances With Wolves* and *City of Joy*, met with Williams and began funding the production. According to an article in the August 30, 1995 edition of *The Los Angeles Times*, Eberts eventually put in \$10 million of the film's \$28 million budget. Eberts wasn't exactly a stranger to animation as he had co-produced *Watership Down*.

Williams continued to work on *T&C*, and reported in a 1988 interview with Jerry Beck that he had 2 1/2 hours of pencil tests for *T&C*, and that he hadn't used the storyboard method to make the film. Williams felt the storyboard method of production was too controlling.

For a filmmaker who was producing this feature with his own financing, this approach was certainly daring and allowed animators to push themselves into creating remarkable scenes. It is not, though, the best way to estimate costs.

Williams' bad experience on *Raggedy Ann* was compounded with his experience with *Ziggy's Gift*, a Christmas special featuring the comic strip character created by Tom Wilson. Williams also told Beck that, even though the production won an Emmy, he didn't want to be a hired hand again on a project.

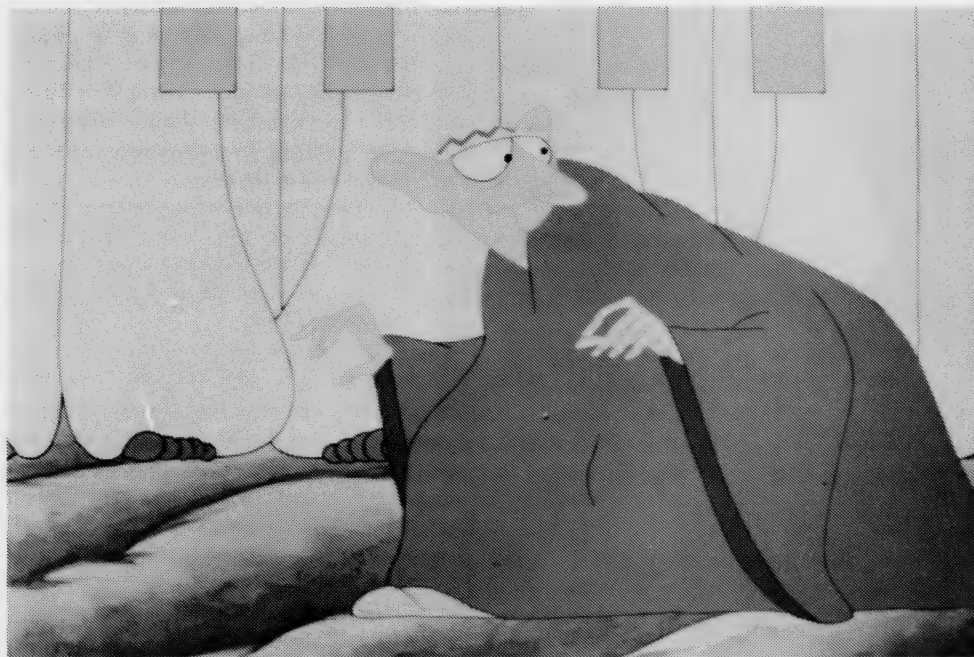
Of course, he was just that on the film which brought him more attention than anything else he's done to date, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. William's supervision on the animation of *Roger Rabbit* gave him the chance he needed to complete *T&C*. Footage of *T&C* helped secure the job on the Disney/Spielberg collaboration, and the overwhelming success of the film certainly reassured people of Williams' abilities. The success of *Roger Rabbit* proved that Williams could work within a studio structure and turn out wonderful animation on time and within budget.

Following the 1988 release of *Roger Rabbit*, Williams concentrated on *T&C*. Charles Champlin in his April 11, 1991 column in *The Los Angeles Times* profiled Eberts and noted that "one of the projects under his wing is *The Thief and The Cobbler*...Williams should be able to finish it at long last."

With money coming in from Eberts' Allied Filmmakers and a distribution deal with Warner Brothers, Williams settled back into his London studio to finish the film.

It was not to be, though.

The production of *The Thief and The Cobbler* had been insured by the Completion Bond Co. in order to protect the films' investors and guarantee the film would actually be finished according to a pre-determined deadline. For today's independent film makers, completion insurance is a necessity in order to line up



The Thief (© Miramax Films 1995)

outside investors.

Williams' deal with Warner Brothers was to deliver his film so Warners could beat Disney's *Aladdin* to the box office in 1992. When Williams missed that deadline, the film was taken from him in May 1992 by the Completion Bond Co. His part in the project that had occupied nearly thirty years of his professional life was over.

The *Thief*, however, had a life of its own.

The Completion Bond Co. now had to finish the film in order to get it released and make back the company's money. With the announcement that the insurance company had taken over the film, the distribution deal previously set up with Warner Brothers fell apart.

Enter Fred Calvert.

Calvert is an animation veteran who had been hired by the Completion Bond Co. as a consultant. He had started his career on the animation staff at Disney in 1956, and left the studio after *101 Dalmatians* to work for the legendary animator Bill Tytla. Calvert subsequently had stints at Format Films and Hanna-Barbera before forming his own company. Working with the Children's Television Workshop, Calvert created 300 to 400 animated films for *Sesame Street*, and later entered the Saturday morning scene producing several series.

He traveled to Williams' London studio several times to check on the progress of the film, and was finally asked by the insurance company to do a detailed analysis of the production status. His conclusion was that Williams was "woefully behind schedule and way over budget," he recalled in an interview

for **ANIMATO!**

Williams did indeed have a script, according to Calvert, but "he wasn't following it faithfully." The Completion Bond Co. did insist that Williams construct a storyboard in order to establish the film's narrative, but Calvert said Williams resisted this request.

"He sort of worked spontaneously," said Calvert "It led him down some futile paths, I think, and he wasn't getting the footage done."

The Completion Bond Co. wanted Calvert to finish the film, an assignment he tried to avoid. When the arrangements with another producer fell through, he took the job "somewhat under protest."

His job was to take the completed footage and literally fill in the narrative gaps in order to make it a commercially-viable film.

"We took it and re-structured it as best we could and brought in a couple of writers and went back into all of Richard Williams' work, some that he wasn't using and found it marvelous...we tried to use as much of his footage as possible."

Of the footage Williams completed, Calvert was only able to use about 50 percent of it, because of the repetitive nature of the scenes. "We hated to see of all this beautiful animation hit the cutting room floor, but that was the only way we could make a story out of it.

"One of the problems, there were a number of these situations...in the script, there might be two or three sentences describing the Thief going up a drain pipe. But what he animated on the screen was five minutes up and down that pipe which would ordinarily be five pages of script...These were the kind of imbalances that were happening. He was kind of Rube Goldberg-

ing his way through. I don't think he was able to step back and look at the whole thing as a story.

"[He's] an incredible animator, though. Incredible. One of the biggest problems we had was trying our desperate best, where we had brand new footage, to come up to the level of quality that he had set," said Calvert.

Inserting several song sequences and giving the film's hero, Tack, a voice were commercial decisions which flew in the face of Williams' concept. While having a speaking hero wasn't Calvert's choice, he felt it was a logical decision in order to tell the story.

To get the film produced in a timely manner and within budget, Calvert sub-contracted certain sequences out to other producers. The first song sequence was produced by the Don Bluth Studio and the second song was by the Kroyer Studio. The third song, sung by the desert brigands, was produced by Calvert.

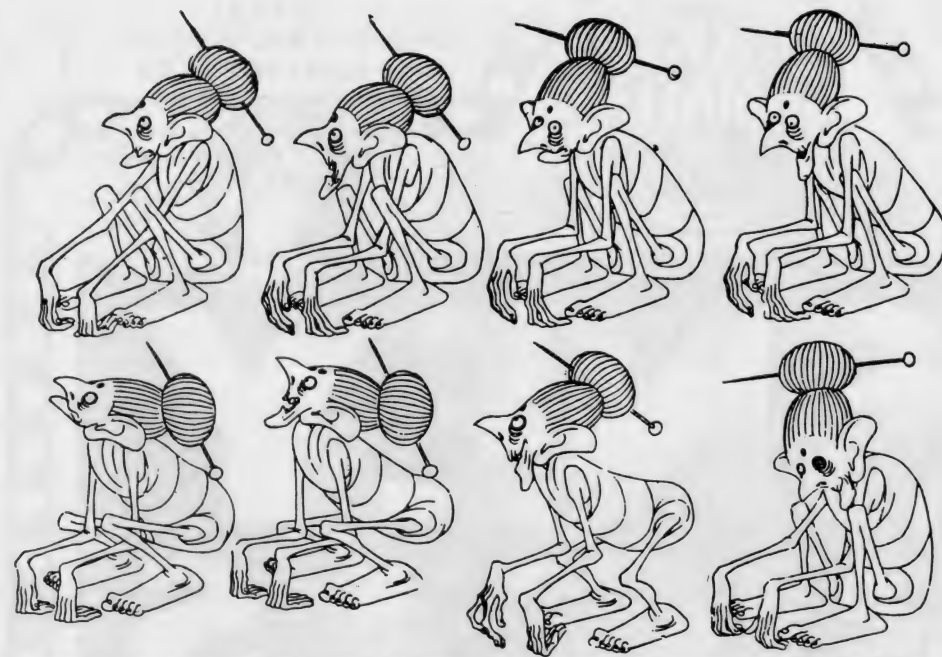
Most of the footage Calvert produced was with animators who had been working on the film under Williams, and he was finished with the film in about a year and a half. By the time Calvert had completed the film The Completion Bond Co. was out of business, largely because of the loss it had sustained on T&C.

"I don't know why they [Miramax] did what they did to it domestically, but it was a sad mistake. If Richard had been able to finish it with a strong story, it would have been magnificent. I think we did our best and delivered a releasable picture."

Once Calvert finished the film, he went to other projects, and was surprised when he learned his version of the film had played in two foreign markets, South Africa and Australia. Known as *The Princess and The Cobbler*, the film is a revelation for those who saw the Miramax cut.

It is radically different in both content and tone from the Miramax release. It seems clear that Calvert had indeed made an earnest attempt to preserve as much of Williams' vision, while adding elements which would heighten the conventional commercial appeal of the film. The changes Calvert made include a voice for the Cobbler (who has about 10 short lines in the film), three song sequences, and adding a romance for the Cobbler and Princess. What Calvert maintained is more important to the film...many of the original voices, has far less narration, more footage of the film's climax concerning the War Machine, and the Mad Holy Witch sequence.

To show off even more of the Williams' footage, Calvert used out-takes as the images under the end credits. There is more footage from the War Machine sequence (the Thief in



The model sheet for the Mad Holy Witch who is only seen as a floating eyeball in the Miramax version.

the air in an accidental airplane); a scene of the Thief falling from the minaret attempting to steal the golden balls; more footage of the Thief attempting to steal the gem from the statue at the base of the Holy Mountain; and a scene in which the Thief is about to steal something from the Princess' bedroom, but discovers the "carpet" on which he is walking is actually a pack of vicious white dog-like beasts. The longest of the end credit sequences shows the Thief attempting to steal green gems out of a bottle, getting caught and having his hands cut off in Islamic justice, only to hobble away to a safe place to reveal his hands hadn't been cut at all!

As animation fan Luke Menichelli pointed out to this writer, the Calvert version of the film does have some loose ends. Tack is carrying a mouse in his pocket after his jail break, but we never see what happens to it. What character is in the sedan chair that is carried into the king's court and is seated next to the king during the polo game?

Even with its additions and cuts, the Williams/Calvert *The Princess and The Cobbler* is a dazzling film, but is not for all tastes. It is not a film that pulls at the heartstrings, or goes for big obvious laughs. It is an adult film in many ways, and its strengths are not necessarily commercial.

In the thirty years in which Williams worked on the film, theatrical animation has seen several downturns and rebirths. Twenty years ago when a director like Ralph Bakshi was making news with *Heavy Traffic*, the farthest thing from a the mind of an artist like Williams is whether or not his film could inspire a line of action figures.

Today, from the point of view of

distributors and theater owners, an animated feature ideally has elements for children that can be exploited by a potentially lucrative merchandising campaign, yet have an edge which adults can enjoy. *The Princess and The Cobbler* does not fit into this definition. Williams' idea for his film is one which substitutes emotional content for visual splendor. Seldom has there been a more incredible example of non-computer-aided animation.

There are more than a few instances to suggest that Williams wanted to do a film more for adults than for children. After all, the chief of the One-Eyes doesn't sit on a throne, but rather on a group of women who are forced to pose in the shape of a throne! Later these women kill the One-Eye chief by throwing him off a cliff. There is a Benny Hill-like urination joke, and Zigzag will probably go down in cartoon history as the first villain who is eaten alive on screen.

There have been a number of reports on how Williams pushed his animators to the breaking point by having them constantly revise sequences and by editing the story of the film by eliminating completed animation.

For instance, in the January/February 1975 edition of *Film Comment*, a profile on animator Grim Natwick includes a cel from the Mad Holy Witch sequence with another character, the Enchanted Prince. This scene isn't in the completed sequences and neither is a scene in which the witch is pointing at a castle which was reproduced in a late Seventies edition of the *International Film Guide*. Did Williams actually edit out finished animation by Natwick whom he had lured out of retirement? How much animation was eliminated because Williams'

vision of the story changed? Interestingly, Natwick (and another animation vet, the late Ken Harris) aren't included in the credits of the Miramax version.

Williams obviously wanted to make a film which was based on a non-commercial production model; a film that was born more out of spontaneous creativity than careful planning. His manner truly tested the limits of hand-drawn animation.

Williams' designs certainly tested the skill of his staff. For instance, look at the character design for the film. Zigzag simply doesn't have hands; he has long fingers which each have three large rings. What an incredible pain that must have been to animate! Tack doesn't have a mouth, per se; his mouth is defined by the cobbling nails he holds by his teeth. The animators must always draw the mouth to allude to this stylistic joke.

The background designs are almost hypnotic, and all of the years of studying Near Eastern art certainly paid off. The palace scenes are amazing, but the War Machine sequence with its obvious M.C. Escher look surpasses even those set at the palace.

The problem with the film, though, lies in its strength. By subjugating character development and emotion to the animation, the film's moment of triumph rings a little hollow.

The War Machine sequence is the climax of the film. The Cobbler confronts Zigzag who is leading the vanguard of the unstoppable One-Eyes, a barbarian warrior nation on its way to sack the Golden City. The Cobbler, following the advice of the Mad Holy Witch, flings a tack at Zigzag. This tack sets off a chain of events which destroys the War Machine and defeats the One-Eyes. Erected over the middle of the War Machine are the three Golden Balls stolen from the Golden City by Zigzag, and the object of the fanatical efforts of the Thief. In the middle of the destruction, the Thief goes about attempting to reach the balls in order to steal them once again.

Every frame of the sequence is crammed with action and reaction. Clearly based on the Buster Keaton school of comedy, the Thief is an "innocent" whose survival is based on simply being in the right place at the right time as the War Machine falls apart.

Unlike Keaton, though, whose unsmiling heroes were always sympathetic, there has been no effort to build any sort of emotional attachment between the audience and the Thief, and, therefore, the sequence has surprisingly little suspense.

The lack of an emotional bond between the audience and the film is *The Princess and The Cobbler's* greatest problem. It is easy to see why Calvert and the Completion Bond Co.

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The Gospel According to Davey and Goliath



By Chuck Miller

It didn't have space aliens, karate-kicking mutants or even a pre-sold toy line. But for 15 years, three million children watched *Davey and Goliath*, the story of a boy, his dog, and the teachings of the Lord. Animated by Art Clokey's Premavision studio, and with scripts provided by the Lutheran Church, the adventures of Davey Hanson and his talking dog became both a popular children's series and an indelible piece of baby boomer pop culture.

"I think, of all the things that I have done in my life, I am most proud of *Davey and Goliath*," said Ruth Clokey Goodell, who worked with the series from the beginning. "We were really doing something to help the children of our country, and of the world. I really am proud of that. This show had a message. It wasn't just junk."

The Lutheran Church not only funded the series, their broadcasting division wrote many

of the scripts, and gave the shows for free to 190 TV stations around the world. Back in the 1950's, when religious broadcasting usually involved Bishop Fulton J. Sheen and a blackboard, Franklin Clark Fry, president of the United Lutheran Church in America, set aside \$1 million in the church treasury to fund production of future television programs. For Fry, he saw how a mixture of the medium and the message might help the Lutheran Church spread the word of God to new places.

A few years later, the ULCA noticed that a small clay green character and his orange horse-Gumby and Pokey-mesmerized children across America. The Church envisioned Biblical lessons as told through this "trianimation" technique. Within days, the ULCA contacted Art Clokey, the creator of Gumby, and asked if his Premavision Studios could produce a new children's show, *Davey and Goliath*, for them.

For Clokey, the Lutherans' offer was his

chance to fulfill a lifelong dream. "I went into Hartford Seminary in 1947 to become a minister," he said in a telephone interview. "Now there were Lutherans, Presbyterians, Greek Orthodox and Episcopalians training to be ministers in their particular denomination. I went there with the idea of becoming a minister. But in the middle of the year, I wanted to make religious films, so I left the seminary in 1948, and went to Hollywood to make religious films. Cathedral Films was the first place I went to. They couldn't take me, because I wasn't a member of the Union. So I went into business for myself, and made commercials for Coca-Cola and Budweiser. I designed and produced TV spots for them for about three years, until I got a chance to make Gumby. It's a wonderful miracle that the Lutheran Church saw Gumby on WPIX, and I flew out to California to make a deal to use the Gumby technique to make this religious series. It was just what I wanted to do."



By the late Sixties, Davey lived in a more culturally diverse neighborhood. The new faces included, from left to right, barbershop owner Henry Lee, Jonathan Reed, Davey's new best friend, and Pops the street vendor who calls his hot dogs "frankfurts" in front of Goliath. (Courtesy Al Eicher/The Program Source)

The first *Davey and Goliath* episode, "Lost in A Cave," premiered in 1960. Each episode was a day in the life of Davey Hanson, his blond-haired sister Sally, and his talking dog Goliath. Of course, Goliath only spoke to Davey; to everybody else he just barked and growled. When he wasn't doing chores, studying at school, or playing with his friends Jimmy, Nat and Teddy, or hanging out at the "Jickets" clubhouse, Davey learned how his world was influenced by God and family.

Each episode was essentially a parable, explained so children could easily understand religious and Scripturological concepts. For example, in "The Runaway," Davey returns home after a quixotic attempt to join the circus, much like the Prodigal Son returned home. A boy who wears "The Polka Dot Tie" is ostracized for being different, in a thinly veiled discussion of tolerance. And in exploiting an untapped area, children's television, with their message, the ULCA found that kids learned Bible lessons in the same way they would learn multiplication tables and conjunction junctions ten years later.

All the human characters on the show, Davey, Sally, his parents, his friends and the adults in the town, were assembled the same way. "They were foam rubber," said Art Clokey, "they were cast in hydrocal molds. First we placed ball and socket steel armatures in the mold, and then cast the foam around it. All but the head. The head was cast in epoxy. I wish we had done it in clay. We would have gotten a better feeling. The lips were cut out pieces of construction paper. And the eyes were like

Gumby's eyes - a white surface, and we'd push the pupil, which would be black or blue, around on Vaseline. The pupil would be a piece of photographic paper that had been exposed and was black."

Goliath, the talking dog, was also foam, except his eyes had the same plastic ping-pong ball look as did Gumby and Pokey. "Jim Danforth was the only one who could get Goliath to walk convincingly," said Spencer Gill, who worked with many of *Davey and Goliath's* animators on other projects. "Goliath had no shoulder joint, just a joint where the leg met the body so the leg couldn't extend outward as Goliath took a step. To see what I'm talking about, move your arm without moving the shoulder, and then do it normally while mimicking the walk of a dog while you are on all fours. You will immediately see why Goliath walked so awkwardly."

Whatever the characters lost in mobility, they made up in durability. According to Art Clokey, the same figurines could be used over and over again. "They could last for the whole series, for two or three years, because we would take them in, put on clean clothes and repair the armatures if one broke. They weren't replaced the way Gumby was. We'd take a whole tray of Gumby's and give them to the animator and he would use up a dozen Gumby's every day."

"The actual storylines were given to us by the Lutheran Church," recalled Ruth Clokey Goodell, "and we had to work within that framework, they supervised all the editing of it and everything. We didn't start shooting until

the script was written and sent to them. Howard Coleman was the man that we worked with the most."

Once Coleman approved the scripts and sent them back to Premavision, filming began. Working one frame at a time, making slight positioning adjustments per each film exposure, the Premavision animation team could crank out a minute of usable film per day, one 15-minute episode per month. And where Gumby's sets and backgrounds were abstract models, clay sculptures and oversized toys, the sets for Davey and Goliath were realistically replicated, as a railroad hobbyist might build a village for his train set. "For *The Silver Mine*,' we built a miniature mine shaft in the middle of the studio," said Clokey, "and actually it looked like rock on the sides, but they were actually painted aluminum foil. For *'A Sudden Storm*,' we had to go outside the studio, there was a big empty lot next door, and we constructed a huge pond that became the lake set. We used actual water. It must have been 30 feet long, 20 feet wide. People ask us how we made such detailed sets - it was simple, we just didn't use a computer."

"Raymond Peck was our supervisor," recalled Ruth Clokey Goodell, "It wasn't thrown together in just a day's time. You would have been amazed had you ever watched the whole process. It really was detailed. It kept our staff very busy. They had good training."

Each episode was created on a shoestring budget. Premavision charged the ULCA \$900 per animated minute, \$15,000 per episode. "They got a good bargain for us, I tell you," said Clokey. "With *Gumby* today, it's now \$15,000 a minute. We produced *Davey and Goliath* on a nonprofit basis. We just made salaries, and no residuals. We were hoping that they would let us make a Davey doll and a Goliath doll and maybe a Sally doll as toys, but they wouldn't. I don't blame them, because they felt it would have commercialized the series."

In 1962, the ULCA merged with the larger Lutheran Church in America, and the LCA took over *Davey and Goliath's* funding. By now 39 episodes had been produced, and thanks to the National Council of Churches Broadcasting and Film Corporation, a major distributor of religious programming, episodes were airing all over North America. *Davey and Goliath* even made inroads into the foreign markets, as the show was translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and Cantonese.

By 1965, the LCA funded a 30-minute holiday special, "Davey and Goliath: Christmas Lost and Found." In this episode, Davey decorates his house, trims the tree and even organizes a Christmas pageant - but doesn't feel Christmasy inside. On the night of the pageant, he offers his role as one of the Three Kings to

another kid, and then understands that in giving away what he treasured most - his role in the pageant - Davey realizes why giving is so important in Christmas.

"Christmas Lost and Found" was so successful that the LCA funded five more *Davey and Goliath* half-hour specials, which stations aired during the holidays. One of these vignettes, "Happy Easter," was a ground breaking episode featuring a subject most children's programs wouldn't dare discuss.

In "Happy Easter," Davey's grandmother dies three days before Easter, and Davey is grief-stricken that he will never see her again. His father, with help from an Easter pageant passion play, explains the concept of death, resurrection, heaven and the afterlife. Davey fights back his tears, knowing that he will see his grandmother again someday, in heaven. "The Easter special was my favorite episode," said B. Baker, who watched *Davey and Goliath* as a child in Jackson, Mississippi. "The appearance of the sweet, kind grandmother — the sort of grandma all of us could use — her extremely sudden off-stage death, and Davey's sorrow. Heck, MY sorrow."

By 1969, the series had become so successful that the LCA asked Premavision to create another run of 15-minute episodes. While Art was no longer part of the series (he and Ruth Clokey were divorced in 1966), Ruth continued to supervise production of the series. "My father was a Lutheran minister," said Ruth Clokey Goodell, "Father Joseph Parkander. I had a lot of training in the Lutheran Church. My whole background was formed by him. It would have been difficult to continue this series if I hadn't had that kind of background."

The new series reflected both the social and multiethnic diversity of the Sixties, and replaced some episodes like "Ten Little Indians" and "The Gang," whose questionable stereotypes did not age well. Davey's friends now included Cisco, a Hispanic boy, and Jonathan, the first black recurring character on the show. Jonathan's father owned a pharmacy/soda shoppe, and the kids hung out there. Other adults in the neighborhood included Mr. Lee, the barber; Pop, the absentminded hot dog vendor; Miss Lindsey, Davey's new schoolteacher; and Officer Dan, the new cop on the beat.

Episodes now concentrated on racial tolerance and integration, charity and community spirit, while still focusing on the life lessons of God and of the Lutheran Church. Davey and Jonathan would redeem pop bottles for movie money, only to discover another boy who hopes to redeem the pop bottles for breakfast money ("Boy in Trouble"). When Davey thoughtlessly pours red paint into a well, he discovers that his "joke" affects the entire ecological community ("The Caretakers"). And stories about polka dot ties were replaced with

stories about the deaf ("Louder, Please") and race relations ("Blind Man's Bluff").

The final *Davey and Goliath* episode, a 30-minute feature called "To the Rescue," premiered in 1975. But within a few years of that broadcast, Davey and Goliath faded from the airwaves. Television stations were no longer under an FCC mandate to set aside time for religious programming, and *Davey and Goliath* was replaced by other profitable ventures like off-network sitcoms and syndicated cartoons. In an ironic twist, many of those time slots were also snapped up by televangelists, who could pay stations to air their sermons - the same stations who originally aired *Davey and Goliath* in those time slots for free.

But the show didn't disappear for long. Al Eicher, president of one of the first companies to market motion pictures for home video, purchased the secular marketing rights for *Davey and Goliath* from the Lutheran Church in 1986. "I got a call from Chris Lee from the Lutheran Church in America. Chris had been in touch with me since 1983, asking if I'd be interested in marketing *Davey and Goliath* on home video. I made a deal and bought the rights from the Church. Over the years, we've moved about a half million units. I was initially only permitted to market it to the Christian bookstore market and catalogs (a competing property, Augsburg Press, reserved other rights). But in the last year, Augsburg got out of the video business, so the church called me and said 'Al, the market's open to you.'"

Since 1990, Eicher has released some of the most popular episodes on videocassette, including such classics as "Christmas - Who Needs It?" and "Happy Easter." Eicher even made some feature-length movies, such as *Davey and Goliath: Lost and Found*, and *Davey and Goliath on Vacation*, by re-editing some of the episodes that had similar themes.

Davey and Goliath can still be

found on some religious and public broadcasting stations, including the VISN and Cornerstone networks. Thanks to Al Eicher, an open-captioned version of *Davey and Goliath* appears each week on the Disability Network. Newly-dubbed episodes can now be seen in Korea, Germany and the former Soviet Union. The series itself has become a part of pop culture, as references to *Davey and Goliath* can be found on shows like *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butthead*, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* and *Mad TV*.

Even Art Clokey is amazed by the sustained popularity of *Davey and Goliath*. "In the 1980's, my wife Gloria and I went on a tour of colleges and theaters, giving lectures and showing episodes of Gumby to students, but at the end, when it was time for questions and answers, they would always ask about *Davey and Goliath*. I was proud that it was so well-received, the spiritual or religious messages were so well-received by so many. And that we had a hand in making them, directing them and so on."

It has also inspired Clokey to create a new religious series, this time starring Gumby. "I was just thinking of a new type of religious series, this time using Gumby, where he goes into various situations that bring out the historical facts about what each religion teaches. The Muslims, Sufis, the Buddhists, the Hindi, and so on. Christians of various faiths, various denominations. At the earliest, we may start production in 1998. But I think it's badly needed, because there's so many misconceptions about other religions, so to speak."



The *Davey and Goliath* episodes featured much detail. Note the trees, park benches, and a wishing well all created on an eighth-inch scale. (Courtesy Al Eicher/The Program Source)

EPISODE GUIDE

71 episodes, 15 minute segments except (*) 30 minute segments.

First series (1960-1962)

The show opens with four trumpeters playing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Davey and Goliath launch a toy rocket into the sky, the rocket spells out the words "Davey and Goliath" in the sky; the letters crumble and fall like snow to the ground.

Lost in a Cave - Davey asks, "What do you mean, God cares about us?" Dad reminds him of a guide who rescued Davey when the family toured a cave and Davey got lost. "God's concern for us is like the guide's concern about you."

Stranded on an Island - Sally, Davey and Goliath are stranded on an island, their boat beached by an outgoing tide. They fear the tide will never return to free them. Of course the tide comes back; God's law has so decreed and does not change.

The Wild Goat - The wild goat that Davey and Goliath rescue from under a heavy tree branch loves his new master, but loves his freedom more. Thinking of the goat's happiness, instead of his own, Davey takes him back to the mountain.

The Winner - Davey is envious of Mike, whose mechanical skills help him to win a soap box derby. Davey dreams that everyone is alike - no competition, no individual goals. Awake, he learns to appreciate his own skills, not be jealous of others' talents.

The New Skates - Davey disobeys his mother and goes skating on dangerously thin ice. He falls through, is rescued by Goliath, but loses one of his new skates. Mother forgives him (as God forgives) out of her deep love for him (like God's love).

Cousin Barney - Davey's young cousin Barney arrives for a visit. He's a quarrelsome youngster and causes no end of trouble. Davey is finally fed up, but Dad's continuing affection for his nephew despite his mischief helps Davey learn about God's unchanging love.

The Kite - Davey and Jimmy invite Teddy to join them in making a kite. The colorful kite soars high until too many flyers tug at the string. Torn paper, crumpled feelings and cross words are finally buried in an act of forgiveness.

The Mechanical Man - Davey is intrigued by a new remote-controlled robot. It can walk, throw a ball, stop - but Davey realizes that it is

mechanical and cannot love. Goliath can love and be loved since he has the gift of life from God.

The Time Machine - A machine discovered in an abandoned house takes Davey, Sally and Goliath (in fantasy) into the past and future. They see God's love and care for Davey's namesake in ancient times (past) and for a space-age boy (future).

On the Line - When Sally asks the blessing, a friend of Davey's asks, "Can you talk to someone you can't see?" The answer: a string telephone is rigged to Davey's tent. Davey, talking to his unseen parents, provides a parallel to conversations with God.

The Polka Dot Tie - Nat, a new boy, is rejected because he is "different" - wears a funny polka dot tie and has a mongrel polka dot dog. Hurt, Nat runs away. Davey and his friends realize that while they have rejected Nat, God has not.

All Alone - Davey's taste for bananas tempts him into a banana-laden freight car. The door slams, the train leaves, Davey is trapped - alone. He reminds himself of something he told Sally: God is everywhere. He waits patiently until he is found.

Pilgrim Boy - Studying about Pilgrims, Davey asks Dad the meaning of "provide." In flashback, the story shows how God provided for the Pilgrims through the Indians who taught a new lifestyle; a Pilgrim boy is saved from danger by a friendly Indian.

The Silver Mine - Davey, Sally and Goliath find an abandoned mine. Davey ignores "Danger" signs, is trapped; Sally sends Goliath for Dad. "Why?" Davey asks. "Don't blame God. He lets you decide what you will do; what happens is your fault, not God's."

Ten Little Indians - Davey fails to make the school track team; fears his father won't love him. Ten little Indians (bowling pins) who refuse to stampede before Dad's arm, prove to Davey that, Indian suit or not, if you have love, failure doesn't matter.

Boy Lost - Dad's present to Davey - a carnival trip. They are separated; Davey is frightened, but certain Dad will find him. Found, Davey asks: "Do people get separated from God?" "Yes, and God looks for us till he finds us as I looked for you."

A Sudden Storm - The Hansons vacation in a cabin in the woods. Lightning, thunder frighten Davey and Sally; the lights go out. But the parents make a game of singing, casting hand-shadow animals. "Why am I not afraid?" Davey

asks. "Because you feel love around you."

The Bell Ringer - The bellringer at Davey's church invites him to see his clock collection. When Mr. Opp is called away, Davey volunteers to wind the clocks daily. "By helping others we help God" is Davey's realization when he saves an antique timepiece.

Not For Sale - Zipping down a slope, Davey loses one of his father's skis. Fearful, he does all kinds of jobs to earn forgiveness. "Good deeds don't buy forgiveness, Davey. I forgive you - as God forgives us all - because I love you."

The Shoemaker - Davey, acting on misunderstanding and suspicion, finds that rumors and lies can hurt people. Dad shows him that the new cobbler, who speaks little English, has a very ill wife "hidden" in that back room, and is a man afraid, not evil.

The Runaway - Davey deserts his daily work routine for the glamour of the circus. Thirsty elephants and endless piles of trash persuade him to go back home. "Does God take us back like this when we do things we shouldn't?" Dad's greeting says yes.

Officer Bob - Tells the youngsters, "Don't ride anyone on the handlebars." But Davey does, with Sally: result - broken rule, broken wheel. Also a broken relationship with Officer Bob - which Dad helps mend, from a point of God's forgiveness.

The Parade - The best homemade float; the best drummer; Goliath in a cage and wearing a ruff as a fierce lion - all are parts of a competition for a pony - where Davey learns the harm of a "small" lie to cover his actions.

The Dog Show - Davey is certain Goliath will win the Show with his roller skate act. Goliath in rehearsal can make it only with one paw on Davey's shoulder. Davey ill, Goliath falls. Davey's doctor explains the dependency of Davey and God, Goliath and his master.

The Waterfall - Goliath tries to swim in a rushing river, is swept toward a waterfall. Davey leaps into a canoe, but both are swept over the falls. Finally on shore, Davey ministers to Goliath. "So," Davey remembers, "do we minister to the needs of everyone."

Happy Landing - On a visit to an airport control tower, Davey watches a neighbor, Hank, guide Dan's plane in to a landing. Admiringly, Davey exclaims that Hank is just like God. "No, Davey, I know some things about it sometimes, but God knows all the time."

Editor-In-Chief - As the reporter for his own newspaper, Davey uncorks an exclusive story - but turns it over to the editor of the local newspaper, who had encouraged him to the point of giving him a small hand press to encourage his efforts.

Man of the House - That's Davey when his father is called out of town. But, when he forgets his duties for juvenile play and an oil delivery spills over the Hanson basement, he tardily learns that responsibility goes hand-in-hand with freedom.

Bully Up A Tree - On Grandfather's farm, Davey meets a bully who torments Goliath, fights Davey. Grandpa says it's hard to love, easy to hate the unloveable - but that's what God wants us to do. When Bully is caught in a tree, Davey, heeding, gets him loose.

Big Apple - The biggest apple in the orchard becomes a symbol for sharing. Davey wants a part, but is reluctant to share his father with farm boy Bill until he learns the lad is fatherless. Sharing, Davey learns, is not only right but fun.

Davey and Goliath 30-Minute Specials (created between 1965 and 1975)

Christmas Lost and Found(December 1965) - Davey has no Christmas spirit; he does all of the Christmas preparations things but nothing works; he can see, smell, taste and hear Christmas, but nothing works. Where is the real spirit of Christmas? Davey is very proud of his role as one of the three kings in the Christmas pageant, but on the night of the program he compulsively gives the role to a lonely country boy, and then comes the beginning of understanding. The real meaning of Christmas had been right in front of him all the time - in the symbolism of the creche at the front window of his home.

New Year Promise (1967) - Davey resolves that he won't yell at little sister Sally any more; decides the only way he can keep his promise is not to talk to her at all. Hurt, Sally runs away, leaving a note: "You don't love me. I have gone away forever." Too late, Davey realized that he should have promised, "I'll be nice to Sally." He and Goliath set out in search of the runaway, and after setbacks, fears and adventures, find Sally in time to reach the church and ring the big bell that hails the coming of the New Year and its promises.

Happy Easter (1967) - Wednesday before Easter Davey visits his adored paternal grandmother. They play baseball together, bake a cake, and plan that they will attend the Easter pageant on Sunday. But on Thursday Grandma is dead. Davey's sadness overwhelms him -

until he watches a rehearsal of the Passion Play. Now he understands why Grandma said Easter was a happy time: because Jesus, after earthly death, still lives, and God who raised Him made the same promise to us all.

Halloween Who-Dun-It (1967) - Davey, masked in a Man from Mars suit, wins a prize that shoots missiles at the town Halloween party. He, Sally in a witch's costume and Goliath as "Tiger," go off to accomplish the usual Halloween mischief, but each is carried away by the knowledge that no one can tell who is behind the disguises. Damage is caused and feelings are hurt, and not mended until all face the realization that masks did not hide their actions from God; that all are responsible for what they did, must repent and try to make amends.

School ... Who Needs It? (1971) - Back to school time, and Davey and his friends in the Jickets clubhouse are in rebellion. "Down with School" ... "I Hate School" ... "School - Who Needs It?" are the slogans on the signs they march with on Opening Day. Through the patience of an understanding teacher ... the enthusiasm of Doug, the new boy in the classroom ... and an accidental fire that almost destroys the class's safety parade float ... Davey and company realize that school teaches valuable lessons and that their teacher is their friend.

To The Rescue (1975) - School summer vacation time, and Davey, Goliath and friends are off to Roaring River Camp. Action in the show is climaxed by an emergency march through a dense forest as the group goes to the rescue of a man and his daughter from the wreckage of a disabled light airplane. "Quite a team," says the grateful flyer as the youngsters provide first aid supplies, improvise a stretcher and lead the injured pair to a road and waiting ambulance. And the youthful team, whose earlier camp experiences have been separated and at times uncooperative, come to know the meaning of interdependence - the major theme of the program.

Second series (1969-1971) Opening with Lutheran shield. Davey and Goliath load a toy rocket, then launch it into the sky. The rocket spells out "Davey and Goliath" in the clouds, the words fall down to the ground and morph into the Lutheran shield. "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" is played as uptempo background music.

The Bridge - "What'll I do?" Davey asks, as a footbridge breaks and his sister Sally is dumped on a ledge six inches above a mountain stream. But he does rescue her - "Fear makes you forget, but trust in God helped you to remember what you knew," says Dad.

The Gang - "The Jickets" is Davey's gang; the group's intemperate attitude toward a youngster with a motor scooter causes Davey personal anguish, club expulsion, and a black eye, before he straightens out a potential fight and personal relationships.

The Lemonade Stand - When Dad Hanson repairs Sally's doll carriage before helping Davey with his lemonade stand, Davey sulks. He comes to sense Sally's need when he hears other girls talk of the doll parade; senses that Dad loves his children equally.

Hocus Pocus -Lorenzo the magician chooses Davey and Teddy to be his helpers. Absorbed by his magic, they go backstage: "You're like God - you can do anything!" Lorenzo points out that his acts were tricks, that he is the reverse of God, who plays no tricks.

Good Neighbor - Free "Good Neighbor" balloons in the park for Davey and his friends, who ignore a lost crying little girl in their haste. Then Davey, recalling what good neighbor means, goes to the lost child's aid, trudging until he finds her home and mother.

A Dillar, A Dollar - Davey and his friend Teddy are sent to the principal's office for tardiness. Their fearful image of Mr. Denny is that of a stern, cold man; instead, he is kind, understanding, sends Teddy home to care for his sick mother.

Rags and Buttons- At a school maypole dance, Sally is crowned Queen of the May, but loses her adored rag doll. Davey finds the doll, then asks: "How can you love this old rags-and-buttons thing?" "Cause I made her - she's mine."

Jeep in the Deep- God's wondrous underwater world is opened to Davey and his father when they don deep sea diving gear to watch a diver recover the family jeep. The vehicle had rolled from a ferry when a chain broke during rough weather.

The Stopped Clock - Davey imagines himself rejected by those around him; decides he doesn't need other people. In a dream about an empty world - parentless, friendless, Goliath-less - he finds how dreary it would be without people to appreciate and a dog to pet!

Who Me? - Davey is lazy, neglectful and irresponsible about the home chores. When Mother, Dad, Sally and even Goliath adopt the same attitude for a day, Davey comes to understand that chores are not just a duty but an expression of love.

If At First You Don't Succeed - Davey vows to be a champion bowler, Sally a concert pianist. Both are quickly discouraged since they expect instant perfection, and quit trying. Dad reminds them that once they couldn't master skateboards, but with practice became skillful performers.

Finders Keepers - Goliath aspires to a gorgeous jeweled collar for his birthday - price \$11.95. Davey finds a ten dollar bill; decides there's no need to return it. But the collar loses its lustre when it is to be purchased with stolen money.

Kokkaburra - Davey failed to study for a test on Australia; needing a good grade, he cheats. But his troubles multiply. To live up to his high grade he cheats more, lies again. Troubled, he confesses to his father, his teacher and God.

The Caretakers - The thoughtless act of pouring red paint into a well, then seeing how hikers, motorists, campers and animals suffer from the pollution, teaches Davey that this is God's world and we must all take responsibility as caretakers of it.

The Hard Way - During a museum visit, Davey ignores signs and warnings that exhibitions must not be touched. He swings from a dinosaur neck; cracks an ancient vertebra. Contrite, he learns that grownups may just possibly know more than small boys.

Rickety-Rackety - Davey sits on Larry to persuade him of the value of their school. Larry fears being scratched from the gym team for poor grades; wants to break up school furniture in his frustration. Davey channels Larry's energies to study.

Help! - When Davey's friend Jonathan is in danger, dangling from a flag pole, both boys learn a new appreciation of their policeman friend Officer Dan. The officer is forced to make a quick decision in order to rescue Jonathan from his predicament.

Boy In Trouble - Davey and Jonathan discover that what for them is fun - collecting empty pop bottles for movie money - is a breakfast money necessity for a new boy, Tommy. In quick sympathy they give Tommy their bottles and enlist neighbors' help.

The Greatest - Nicky, new in the neighborhood, constantly boasts about his father. Davey learns that Nicky has no father, lies because he feels himself "different." Nicky's need for a father figure is supplied by the pastor; his need for understanding by his friends.

Blind Man's Bluff - Jonathan's cousin Scottie doesn't like white boys. When Scottie's eyes are temporarily hurt and he must wear a

blindfold, he meets Davey for the first time and discovers that it's the boy, not the color, that really matters.

Who's George? - Visiting his friend Jonathan, Davey observes how neighbors ignore signs of trouble when milk bottles accumulate in front of the door of the man down the hall. Davey and Goliath discover what the saying "Let George do it" means.

Six-Seven-Six-Three - Goliath needs a collar or tattoo for identification, but Davey thinks the law is "dumb." When a dognapper who has snatched Goliath releases him after discovering the new tattoo, Davey finally realizes laws are for the good of society.

The Zillion Dollar Combo - Davey, Jonathan and Mickey, as a new performing band, must choose between their first paying job - performing in front of a theatre for \$2 apiece - or playing at a children's hospital for free.

Upside Down and Backwards - Davey nearly panics when the electricity fails and a branch breaks a window while he and Goliath are home alone during a storm. Afterward they act out the things they should have done if they had used their heads.

Louder, Please - Not realizing that the new kid in the neighborhood is deaf, Davey chastises him for not paying attention when crossing the street. Later, when he finds out the boy is deaf, Davey atones by wearing earplugs and missing the sounds he once took for granted.

Ready or Not - Davey and Goliath visit a park which has deteriorated greatly since their last visit. As they organize parents and friends to restore the park as a place of enjoyment they learn that ecological concern and action are forms of service.

Kum Ba Yah - Davey and his friends form a bell choir to perform "Kum Ba Yah," but Davey becomes angry with Cisco and refuses to perform. Davey remembers the hymn's words, is reminded of the responsibility to the group and they perform together.

What's His Name - A stranger scratches "Davey and Goliath" in a neighbor's concrete driveway. Davey's accused and his urge for revenge distresses even Goliath. But a Bible lesson guides Davey to the real meaning of forgiveness and the acquisition of a new friend.

Pieces of Eight - Davey becomes fascinated with pirates and buries his Jickets club's baseball fund in a tin box. When a sudden rain washes away the treasure, he works hard and, with a loan from his sister's piggy bank, replaces the

money.

Chicken - When his friends call him chicken, Davey attempts a dangerous leap at a construction site and ends up in the hospital. He learns the hard way to follow his own conscience instead of doing what's wrong when he knows better.

The Doghouse Dream House - Goliath's doghouse is destroyed in a storm and Davey must build a new one by himself. He lacks confidence and thinks he needs his father's help, but in the end he succeeds alone and discovers it's great to be independent.

The Good Bad Luck - On a class trip to a nearby forest, with Goliath as mascot, Davey and Jonathan become lost and Goliath is no help because he has a cold. When they are rescued they resolve to follow the teacher's instructions next time.

The Watchdogs - Davey witnesses a holdup in front of his house but doesn't want to get involved. Officer Dan, Davey's father and a neighbor stage a robbery in which Goliath is supposedly stolen and Davey remembers the lesson of the Golden Rule.

Come, Come to the Fair - Davey's Sunday School class plans a Folk Fair, including an exhibit of how different cultures depict the coming of the Christ Child. Goliath is happy when he finds that he comes from "dogparents from all over."

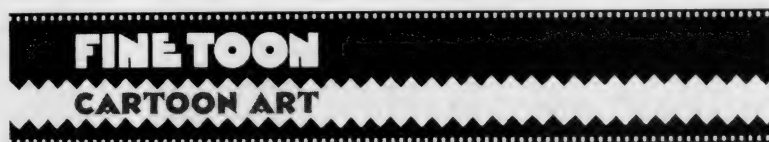
The Family of God - Davey's parents become Cisco's stand-in parents at the boy's First Communion. This episode was not part of the original syndication package, but was instead used in elementary religious education classes.

Chuck Miller, a freelance writer from Albany, NY, first appeared in ANIMATO! with an article on hockey cartoon star Peter Puck.

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アニメ ANIMATO! ANIME GUIDE

by Patrick C. Duquette, Bob Miller, John Beam, Celina Brooks



Zenki Overview

After giving *Zenki* Volume #1 a lukewarm review in *ANIMATO!* 32, I have softened my criticism considerably. Given the opportunity to review volumes 2, 3, 4 and 5 as a group, I've a new appreciation for the *Zenki* series - especially the writing. My quibbles still stand from the initial review, but I was won over by the storyline. I enjoyed the unexpected twists in the plot and appreciated the internal logic of the supernatural elements. I also found myself chuckling at the humorous segments.

I must confess I viewed the volumes out of order, (3-4-2-5) which didn't diminish my enjoyment in the least. However, to get the full effect of the introduction of Sohma Miki, videos should be screened in chronological order.

Each episode includes all the "bumpers" which appeared on Japanese television. I am sure completists would holler if they were missing. In terms of value for the money, \$24.95 for two television episodes is pricey. Take out all the repetitive theme songs, intros, closers and bumpers, and the stories would fit on one T-160 tape.

Most video distributors seem to take liberties with advertised running time. These are no exception. Boxes claim the tapes are 60 minutes. (Volume #1 is 90 minutes) Tapes are sixty minutes, however, the contents are closer to 48-50 minutes.

In the following reviews I will attempt to share my thoughts and feelings for each episode without giving away too many surprises.

To avoid repetition I will quote the overview from Volume #1 liner notes and list the major characters.

Long ago, there was a demon lord whose life had been bound to a mountain-dwelling monk. He was Zenki, the great and powerful. Under the control of the monk, Enno Ozuno, Zenki battled the forces of darkness before they were sealed for all time. Now, 1200 years and 55 generations later, the most powerful of all demon lords is needed once more!

With the coming of the malevolent god Karma, evil forces are at work in the world, and the one person who can stand against them is a high school girl! Chiaki is the latest descendant of the legendary Enno Ozuno, and heir to the control of the mighty Zenki. When Karma minions show up at her family's shrine to steal one of the deadly Seeds of Possession (they're like walnuts, only EVIL) sealed inside.

Chiaki is thrown into a life or death duel to meet her destiny! She must resurrect the all-powerful demon lord Zenki!

Problem: Zenki seems to be a bit less powerful than advertised. In fact, without Chiaki to give him his power, he's down right wimpy. And if Chiaki can figure out how to turn this obnoxious little kid into the mighty demon lord,

there's no guarantee Zenki won't be as dangerous as the monsters he called upon to fight.

Other major characters include: Evil Karma and her Apostles: Anju, Guren and Gohra. Saki, Chiaki's grandmother. Master Jukai, monk and brother of Saki. Sohma Miki, a famous devil-fighting monk. Kuribayashi, a monk-in-training. With the exception of Sohma Miki all the good guys reside at the Enno shrine on Mount Shikigami near the village of Shikigami-cho.

A word about the Seeds of Possession. Once someone comes in contact with a "seed" their base desires are augmented to the extreme until the unlucky victim eventually turns into a Possession Beast.

Volume #2, Episode 4 *The Jar of Desires.*

Master Jukai covets an ancient vase which a local antique dealer sells to a greedy collector. Once the seal is broken on the vase, a Seed of Possession takes over the collector's body. Unlimited gold "dust" inside the vase turns anything it comes in contact with into solid gold. Naturally, the collector skips around Shikigami-cho gleefully dusting everything, including people. (Shades of King Midas!) The collector morphs into a beast which even Zenki has trouble combating because trying to grasp the grotesque beast will result in a solid gold, useless appendage. The design of the creature is interesting, to say the least. (Think of E.C. Segar's *Alice the Goon* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Gollum* having a love child.) Action with plenty of morality and life lessons.

Volume #2 Episode 5.

The Appetite Fiend. A chance to highlight another example of the Seven Deadly Sins - Gluttony. While Zenki loves to eat Seeds of Possession, he also has an enormous appetite for mortal food. The brat-demon lord discovers Chiaki's school cafeteria and plans an eating frenzy. Meanwhile, the principal of the school and self-proclaimed gourmet (read glutton) gets

infested with a "seed." After the principal eats all the food in the school, he naturally turns into a lumbering beast with a gaping maw on top of its' face.

Completely in character and logical, Zenki surprises Chiaki with a shocking turn of events. I can't divulge the plot twist without spoiling the episode. Suffice to say, events work out for the best when they fight as a team combining wit and brawn to defeat the beast. Interesting episode.

Volume #3 Episode 6 *TeleTemptation*

This is the episode that changed my outlook on the Zenki series. The story concerns a lethargical, lonely kid (Hiroshi) from a single parent family. Left home alone after school, Hiroshi makes phone calls to neighbors and asks questions like; "Do you know how many weird creatures still walk the earth?" Not exactly the Jerky Boys. By current American standards of child behavior, Hiroshi's downright likable and a candidate for public acclaim.

Anju takes advantage of the youngster's loneliness and saddles him with a Seed of Possession. The possessed Hiroshi can get "friends" simply by calling them on the telephone. Whoever he calls is literally sucked into the phone lines and transported to a nether-void holding area in an abandoned building. Basically, human E-Mail. When Master Jukai disappears after answering the phone, Zenki and Chiaki let themselves be transported via the phone lines to find the source of the disappearances. Hiroshi morphs into a dragon to stop Zenki and they fight it out. Retreat for the dragon is impossible because Saki and Kuribayashi have cut all the phone lines to the building.

SPOILER WARNING: I wasn't going to discuss this segment, but I wanted to touch on it because the writers avoided a clichéd formula. When Zenki kills the dragon, Hiroshi lingers, then expires. A totally unexpected twist because young monk Kuribayashi survived a possession after Zenki killed his "beast" in a Volume #1 episode. In yet another, Chiaki begs Zenki to defeat a creature without killing because the Possession Beast is a friend.

Hiroshi's mother gets a phone call from beyond. We find Hiroshi is in heaven and "can talk to friends all over the world." Nice ending.

Volume #3 Episode 7 *The Obsessed Runner.*

Shunichi, a high school track star wants to be the fastest runner in Japan. He's also haunted by dreams of running and never reaching the finish line. His new "private" coach is actually Gohra. Shunichi is naturally possessed by a "seed" and "coach" has the boy running through town at blinding speed. Shunichi's path traces a pentagram which completes a spell to change him into a beast. Zenki's on his trail because he

can smell a seed. Saki is reminded of a similar incident of ancient lore called The Legend of Oeyama Drinker. Chiaki's unfamiliar with the story, so Master Jukai chastises her for not knowing the legend. As Jukai recounts the story, rendered in traditional artwork, he himself must rely on Kuribayashi to complete the tale. I mention this humorous segment because it also injects a sense of traditional storytelling in a modern television cartoon.

After spell papers and chanting fail to stop the Possession Beast, Zenki pursues the beast. Even Zenki (the powerful demon-lord) can't catch the Beast, so Chiaki suggests he "become the finish line" to end Shun's nightmare.

**Volume #4 Episode 8 *The Mummy Inn*
Episode 9 *The Devil in the Basement***

Actually a two-parter, this volume completes the introduction of the mysterious monk, Sohma Miki, only glimpsed in Volume #2.

Due to a rare alignment of stars, demon-lord Zenki is not at his full power. Conversely, brat Zenki seems to be tougher. Guren takes this opportunity to challenge Zenki. Meanwhile Chiaki and old chum Nami are going on a free vacation provided by a new spa that caters only to young women... I was suspicious just reading the video box notes! Naturally, the owner of the spa/hotel is a beautiful woman of indeterminate age. Before you can say "Gloria Holden," Chiaki and Nami take the requisite au-natural dip in the spa. Their idyll comes to an abrupt end when brat-Zenki lands in the hot water due to a rough 'n' tumble misunderstanding with Sohma Miki. Chiaki chases the embarrassed monk and returns to find two mummified girls in the spa. Before anyone can say "X-Files," Chiaki and Nami's room is infested with vampire leeches and everyone is disappearing from the hotel.

Chiaki becomes furious with Zenki for challenging Master-of-Evil Guren instead of rescuing Nami, who's being menaced by leeches. In a fit, Chiaki throws her summoning bracelet at Zenki. Guren wants to destroy Zenki, but demon pride prevents him (for the time being) from killing Zenki while in his kid-demon aspect. Ally monk, Sohma Miki steps in to protect little Zenki and distract Guren.

When Zenki is at his most vulnerable, Guren is summoned back to his dark realm. Seemingly a plot device to save Zenki for future episodes, there is a reason for Karma's recall: If Zenki isn't vanquished he will gain more power in future encounters.

Eventually we find the motel mistress is using the blood of young girls to maintain her youth. (Shock! Disbelief!)

Confronted, she forms all her pet leeches into one hideous entity with herself as the "brain." This possession beast is the best animated creature in this series to date.

The group uses it's collective wit and

ability to defeat the creature, including a *Yamato/Star Wars* style vision for Chiaki from Enno Ozuno.

This was one of my favorites of the series because a little humor is injected into the proceedings without disrupting the dark overture of vampirism.

**Volume #5 Episode 10
*March of the Hell Hound***

A very busy episode. While Chiaki is away visiting a school chum's kennel, the Enno shrine comes under physical attack from Gohra.

Saki, Jukai, and Zenki acquit themselves quite well against an onslaught of wooden spikes. Meanwhile, Chiaki's friend Yutaka, who raises dogs, comes into direct contact with a "seed" after removing it from a dog's throat. The evil seed uses Yutaka's fondness for dogs and absorbs all the dogs from his kennel into his torso. This is an odd twist since a desire to own canines isn't exactly a negative feeling. Apparently, any strong desire is all that's needed to trigger a possession. Cerberus is the fitting name for this Possession Beast. When Chiaki summons Zenki she tells him the beast is yet another one of her schoolmates, and asks that Zenki not kill her friend.

While Zenki engages Cerberus, Sohma Miki joins the fray against Gohra back at the shrine. The conflicts are resolved again using the skills of everyone involved and a touch of nature when the dogs rebel against the beast and attack him internally during a thunderstorm. All this happens at a slow pace with no bloodshed.

**Volume #5 Episode 11
*A Voice from the Underworld***

A scholar arrives at the Enno shrine seeking information on an ancient group of samurai. What he finds is a Seed of Possession that already has a body in thrall. The Enno shrine gang must now deal with a double possession. The Samurai's story is told in dream-like segments which is the main thrust in this episode.

A possessed samurai rises from the water, not aware 800 years have passed since his last battle. He morphs into a beetle-like demon with retractable blades. More than a match for Zenki, things don't look good for the demon-lord. It falls to another 800-year old samurai to save the day.

The samurai tale is rendered in a brown palette which makes it distinctive and eerie at the same time.

While I'm not going out and getting a Zenki tattoo, I could recommend this series to young people. Some parents might object to the casual nudity in some episodes and the fighting in every episode. (Nudity, by the way, isn't taboo on Japanese television.) Zenki's confrontations with the Possession Beasts are stylized (almost static) with no real bloodshed.

As stated before, the writing gets decent marks and the music is first rate. You'll catch yourself humming the *Zenki* theme after one episode.

Character design will give you a familiar feeling. At a squinty-glance, brat *Zenki* could be mistaken for Goku from *Dragon Ball*. One particular Possession Beast resembles Todd McFarlane's demon from *Spawn*. Change Chiaki's hair and she would be interchangeable with numerous Anime heroines.

Characters don't seem to learn from one episode to another. They always seem surprised, for instance, when attacked by Karma's minions.

Overall the animation is better than what you'd expect from a television series on a budget. I did notice a few subtle improvements as the series progressed. Example: A shadow under Saki's lip doesn't move when she speaks in an early episode. In the very next story the shadow moves in a natural fashion with her lower lip movement. Someone at the studio cares enough to notice and make this improvement.

The subtitles were always easy to read and the translation seems to be geared to Americans. "Let's do it, grandma!" could be a literal translation. Only once did I notice a verbal exchange with no subtitles.

If you are one of our curious subscribers who hasn't been exposed to anime, or a parent looking for something to satisfy a twelve-year-old, this series would be a solid choice.

I would suggest renting the volumes from your local video mill or comic book shop. Just don't eat walnuts while you're watching.

- Patrick C. Duquette

Blue Water

Alt. titles: *Blue Water has a Secret*

The Secret of Blue Water

The year is 1889. Throughout the world, a mysterious force is attacking ships at sea. Is it a monster, or a secret weapon? A world war looms as nations blame each other for the attacks.

A 14-year-old French inventor, Jean Coq de Raltigue, builds an aeroplane to find his father, missing at sea after one of the attacks. In Paris, he teams with 14 year-old Nadia, a spirited African girl and an indentured circus acrobat, who has an affinity for nature and a pet lion cub named King. Nadia possesses a crystal pendant of Blue Water, which, unknown to her, can unlock the technology of her mysterious ancestors (a plot device inspired by *Lupùta: Castle in the Sky*). Seeking the crystal is a fiery redhead, the spoiled, rich Italian heiress, Lady Grandis Granva and her two henchmen, inventor Hanson and lady's man Sanson.

Eventually they cross paths with Captain Nemo, who happens to be Nadia's father. With his powerful Nautilus submarine, Nemo (in Latin, the name means "no one") battles the forces of Gargoyle, leader of Neo-Atlantis.

Gargoyle — whose weapons have been the cause of the shipwrecks — plans on dominating the world with his superior technology. To complete his plans, he must possess the secret of Blue Water within Nadia's crystal.

The Secret of Blue Water comes from Japan's Gainax studio, which had produced the feature *Wings of Honneamise* and the *Gunbuster* OVAs. NHK television sponsored 39 episodes of the series, *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia* (*Nadia of the Mysterious Seas*), broadcast from April 13, 1990 to March 29, 1991.

In 1992, Streamline Pictures adapted and released the first eight episodes for home video, under their "Video Comics" label.

"The original plan was to do all 39," says story editor Fred Patten. "In a sense, that is still the plan, but what Carl [Macek, the producer] really wanted to do was get Nadia onto television. He did not want to release all of them on videotape first.

"The expense of having to dub all of the episodes without having a TV sale first would have meant spending more money before he could get the video income to cover it. It's already been such a hard sell that we haven't been able to get it on TV, but it would be even harder if he tried to sell something that was already completely available on home video. What he hoped to do was build up enough interest by the time he got up to episode eight or twelve, that he could point to a genuine popular demand, which would help increase the TV salability. That has not happened. Yet."

The English-language cast stars Ardwright Chamberlain (voice of Admiral Hayes in *Robotech* and Ambassador Koch in *Babylon 5*) as Jean, Wendee Lee (Vanessa Leeds in *Robotech*, Uri in *Dirty Pair*) as Nadia, Melanie McQueen (Lisa Hayes in *Robotech*) as Grandis Granva, Steve Kramer (*Robotech*'s Angelo Dante) as Sanson, Tom Wyner (scriptwriter, director of *Zillion*) as Hanson, Jeff Winkless (Tony Gleck in *8 Man After*) as Captain Nemo, Steve Bullen (*8 Man*, *Casshan*, *Crying Freeman*) as Gargoyle, Cheryl Chase (Mai in *My Neighbor Totoro*) as four-year-old orphan Mary, and Edie Mermin (Fujico in *Lupin III*, Miriya in *Robotech*) as Nautilus executive officer Electra. Producer Carl Macek (*Robotech*) growls for the lion, King. Other voices include Cliff Wells (Doctor in *Lily-C.A.T.*), Bill Capizzi (the *Robotech* Masters), Michael Forrest (Mr. Gord in *Zillion*, Apollo in *Star Trek*) and Bob Bergin (Porky Pig, Henery Hawk).

Orion Home Video has repackaged the series, and on January 30, released the first eight episodes in two volumes — four episodes (94 minutes) per tape. Orion is currently negotiating with Streamline as to whether they'll continue the series, which is projected to be eight volumes, priced at \$14.98 per volume.

"Right now, the new plan is to bring out a complete story, but not all 39 episodes," Patten

says. "Even in Japan, they had to do a lot of padding for television because the story is not really long enough to go all 39 episodes.

"The Japanese had what they called 'The Island Sequence' which is about half-a-dozen episodes where Nadia and Jean and Mary and the lion, King, are marooned on a desert island, a sort of Robinson Crusoe situation. Basically, they're padding for half-a-dozen episodes to make up the 39, then they went back to the adventure. In Japan, they brought out a laserdisc collection called *The Nautilus Story*, which is the basic story that cuts out the extraneous material."

In the American release, "Seven episodes' worth of material will be dropped, but it is not necessarily seven complete episodes. There will doubtlessly be some episodes that are completely dropped. For example, there's an episode where all the characters are singing karaoke. I don't think there will be anything salvageable in that one. In other cases, they might take half of one episode and half of another and splice them together."

"The Japanese have already done that, on *The Nautilus Story*," Patten says. "So, we've got their condensations to work from. It's not as though we are butchering something that the Japanese would never touch."

In *The Secret of Blue Water* [video] series, Carl is bringing something a little more complete than *The Nautilus Story*, but it still leaves out a fair bit that, if there's a real fandom for *Nadia*, people will want to see it. As just regular episodes, they don't stand on their own that much.

"Carl's going to try to build up the popularity of *The Secret of Blue Water* and make more pitches to television. If he makes a TV sale, then all 39 episodes as they were done [broadcast] in Japan will appear on television."

According to Patten, "One of the reasons why it was popular in Japan was it was one of the highest quality TV cartoon series (as opposed to OVAs or theatrical releases), so we do think it has a good chance to get on television in America as well as have sales to the *Anime* fans."

Other reasons for its popularity, Patten says, is "it has a timeless story, Jules Verne-type story. It has a lively spirit. There's also adventure, and humor. A strong female lead. And, a mystery: What is the secret of the blue water pendant? Who are the Neo-Atlantian villains trying to conquer the world? Why does this world have all this super-scientific technology that our world does not have? (It's supposed to be a parallel universe sort of thing.)"

Beyond its inspiration from Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Blue Water* also "borrowed" the style of Japanese director Hayao Miyazaki, particularly from the film, *Lupùta: Castle in the Sky*. Notably, animation director Hideaki Anno had served Miyazaki in

Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind.

"They were trying to take a number of elements popular among Japanese fandom at the time," Patten confirms, "and certainly Miyazaki was very popular." A lot of people thought Miyazaki had drawn the characters [actually designed by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, of *Wings of Honneamise*].

"Also, big flying machines. Miyazaki's love for what some fans call 'retro-technology' and others have said is just a love for the past. He likes to do things that have a 19th century Jules Verne-ish feel to them. So, that was certainly in there," Patten says.

Such was the show's popularity that a theatrical sequel was produced and released, in June 1991. *The Fuzzy Story* occurs three years after events in the TV series. At age 17, Nadia is working as a secretary at a London newspaper, when a new world threat occurs: Famous world figures are suddenly dissolving into clouds of gas, and the governments are panicked.

Patten elaborates: "A mysterious young girl is washed upon shore after a storm. Her name is Fuzzy, and she is the key to the whole mystery, which Jean investigates because there are some unknown scientific principles involved and of course he's interested in the scientific point of view. Grandis and company are after it because they're the sort of criminals after whatever it is. In other words, they've gone back to the same positions they were back at the beginning of *Nadia*, just as *Ghostbusters II* returned everybody back to the start of *Ghostbusters* (and that's one of the problems with the movie, by the way). King is not in the movie at all.

"It turns out that another mad scientist has his own plot to conquer the world. At the end he's defeated and everybody presumably lives happily ever after."

"When Gainax made this movie, they had a problem: In the final episode of the TV series, they said the adventure is over and everybody lives happily ever after."

"They defined that by a brief epilogue: it's now 20 years later. The grown-up Mary describes what happened to all of the characters. Nadia and Jean got married, as everybody expected they would and they have their own kids now. Grandis was doing something reasonably respectable. Hanson — the fat henchman — had become a Henry Ford-type president of a big company, so instead of being Grandis' pet inventor and doing all these fancy things just for her, he was now commercializing his talents.

"The producers had to insert some adventure which would not contradict any of that, and at the same time, was supposed to create enough suspense as whether the characters would meet a dire fate. It didn't really work out," Patten says.

Currently, Streamline Pictures has no plans of adapting *The Fuzzy Story*. "That doesn't mean we're *not* going to; it's just that we don't have a TV series out, so it's much too early to think about the feature. As I say, it was not all that good." The TV series was very popular, and they wanted to take advantage of that popularity before it faded. I don't know whether you'd say that the feature had no effect on the popularity or helped it fade even faster," Patten says with a chuckle.

- Bob Miller

Here is Greenwood 1-6 Software Sculptures

This somewhat odd, yet highly entertaining six part OVA (direct-to-video animation) is something I probably would not have ever considered watching, had it not been for the fact that I knew of fans who really liked it. The title just does not stand out as something dynamic (like "Super-Dimensional Fortress Space Battleship Somthingorother"). In fact, if you are looking for "dynamic" in terms of flashy animation and effects, maybe you should look elsewhere. But, if you are looking for good storytelling, with a sizable helping of humor, then *Here is Greenwood* is for you.

The first episode covers an awful lot of material, spanning an entire school year in the life of Kazuya Hazukawa (the main protagonist). It is difficult to sort out everything at first, but once the story actually begins, it becomes much easier viewing the rest of the way. This story tells of Kazuya's desire to forget about his first love, who asked him for permission to marry his older brother. He goes to live in a boy's dormitory, and finds that matters are not much better there. He is made to believe his roommate is a girl (he's actually a boy with feminine characteristics), and his upper-classmates seem bent on making his life miserable. However, after the initial rocky start, Kazuya's once-tormentors begin to show actual concern for his situation and help him out. By the end of the first episode, Kazuya is returning from Christmas vacation and is happy he is back where his friends are.

The first four episodes deal mostly with humorous aspects of the characters, but the last two tell a rather straightforward love story concerning Kazuya and Miya Igarashi, a girl from another school. Kazuya becomes attracted to Miya when he sees how completely unhappy she is, and he wants to protect her from the people who cause her sadness. One Tenma Koizumi believes he is Miya's boyfriend, but he is actually causing much of her unhappiness. Kazuya, on the other hand, is the only person in Miya's life who recognizes her beauty, and he wants to help her become a better person. Miya realizes this, but is torn because her family is very close to Tenma's, and she tends to run away from conflicts. This two-part story is

more balanced in it's approach than the first four, and brings a worthy conclusion to the series. My only gripe is that I think six episodes are not nearly enough.

In terms of the animation, character designs, backgrounds, and overall production, *Greenwood* rates very high. This is based upon a girls' comic written and drawn by Yukie Nasu, and this will definitely appeal to female audiences. However, I have encountered as many guys who like this, so the appeal here is very broad. The soundtrack is, for lack of a better word, outstanding. The closing number for episode six ("I'm so glad I love you") chokes me up every time I hear it. *Here Is Greenwood* is still a relative unknown among most anime and manga fans, but I see a groundswell of support for it. Hopefully, Software Sculptors will be very successful with their release of this fine video release. Highly recommended.

- John Beam

Vampire Princess Miyu, Volume 1

AnimEigo

Subtitled, 50 minutes, Stereo Hi-Fi

#AT092-004



There are far too many anime releases in this country termed as "horror" that are merely a series of sequences depicting demonic monsters with enormous phalluses raping every orifice in sight. Thank goodness AnimEigo comes out with productions that are tasteful, in-keeping with anime fan expectations, and successfully targeting mainstream audiences. *Vampire Princess Miyu* is the only anime production I have seen under the genre of "horror" that doesn't try to "gross out" or offend it's audience. This is a very intelligently-told

short series, and I have yet to meet anyone who has seen this who has not decided that it is excellent.

This series is about an spiritualist named Himiko, and in episode one, she is called to Kyoto to investigate the murder of a number of women. Now, these are not your run-of-the-mill murders of women (of the Ted Bundy variety). These women have lost every drop of blood in their bodies, and the only wounds in their bodies are puncture holes in their necks. Sounds like a supernatural occurrence, right? Well, even Himiko is skeptical, until she is almost attacked by this creature. However, she is saved by a young girl and a sinister-looking cloaked figure. Later, Himiko encounters the same girl, who is seen taking blood from the neck of a boy who is grief-stricken by the loss of his girlfriend. Himiko tries to dispel the girl using traditional means, but fails (she is also dumbfounded by the fact that this female vampire can exist in daylight).

As the story progresses, we learn that true vampires only share blood with those who desire them to do so, and in exchange, that person is given eternal immortal happiness. However, there are imitation vampires called "Shinmas" who only take the lives of their victims and are totally destructive. This strange girl, and her enormous manservant "Larva", have a sworn duty do defeat these Shinma, and to grant anyone's hearts desire to become immortal. On the other hand, Himiko sees this girl vampire as a menace, and attempts to foil any attempts to use her power for what she sees as necessary for the good of all.

In a way, this vampire princess IS somewhat diabolical, since in the process of bestowing immortality to others, her "victims" lose their identity. However, she is not bound by human morals and laws, so it cannot be said that she is evil. This is gothic horror at it's best. The director for this series is Toshihiro Hirano, who brought *FIGHT! ICZAR-ONE* and *DANGAIO* to life in the '80's, and is one of Japan's finest OVA directors. Apart from a few shaky scenes here and there, this is a first-rate production in every way. In fact, it will probably only disappoint those anime "fans" who get into gross violence and sex.

- John Beam

Bounty Dog
Manga Video
60 minutes
Dubbed

Bounty Dog, released in 1996 by Manga Entertainment Inc., is set in the future. It takes place on the now colonized moon. The booming metropolises on the moon's surface were the result of one company's work, Constans. The *Bounty Dog* Investigation Unit is sent to the moon to investigate the unusually high electromagnetic reading emanating from there;



their "client" feels that Constans may be developing a weapon. This proves false. One member of the team has other reasons for being there.

The movie can be considered light entertainment only. The animation was very well done, character movement was fluid, there was a sense of depth to the scenes, and the color and scene designs were interesting. However it wasn't extraordinary, it wasn't anything that couldn't be found elsewhere, and I couldn't recommend watching it for the animation alone. The story on the surface was intriguing enough but closer inspection revealed plot holes and story gaps.

Most characters were flat and undeveloped, with the possible exception of the main male character. Throughout the movie (two episodes actually) there were soliloquies that were used to try and set the mood, sometimes mysterious, sometimes foreboding, but they came off sounding undeveloped and corny. The writer didn't take the time or the thought to flesh it out and make the scenes more eloquent. To make matters worse, the dialog in the movie was crude and choppy. You never really got the sense that this could be a real person; most normal people don't talk like these characters did. I will give the story the benefit of the doubt and say that it could have been sloppy translation. The movie was dubbed. However with the plot holes and unexplained events I'm inclined to believe it was poor writing.

The plot itself did not flow well. Sometimes it seemed to be thrown together at the last minute. When certain background information was needed, to "help" fill in plot holes, the whole movie came to a screeching halt while a scene was inserted to give this vital information.

It was never subtle. Events happened that were never fully explained. One character was shot with several fatally poisoned darts but lived. Yet later in the movie died from other wounds. It was at the end and she served her purpose for the plot, so now she can die. The darts were fired at her by the "police." Later it was revealed that they wanted to talk to her; well if you're dead you can't talk. However the story line was ready for the damsel in distress, so you got a distressed damsel. Several times a flashback scene was shown, but not why it was or what it was exactly. There were assumptions made that had no previous clues or warning. When the movie was finished, the bad girl was defeated and the good guys won, but it left a lot of unanswered questions.

If you have anything better to do, go for it. *Bounty Dog* is a movie that you can either watch or not. If you don't watch it you will not miss anything. If you do watch it you will kill a couple of hours and may enjoy it. However don't watch it again and don't ponder it!

- Celina Brooks

Spirit of Wonder - Miss China's Ring
AnimEigo
Subtitled, 45 minutes, Stereo Hi-Fi
#AT 095-008



This is probably the most difficult anime story I have ever tried to evaluate. On one hand, it seems too devoid of conflict and traditional story elements. However, it is so appealing in terms of the character animation and personalities. I want to see much more emotional impact with this story, but Miss China's Ring does well enough to earn my recommendation of it.

Miss China's Ring is about a young woman who runs an inn during the late 19th century at a fictional English location called "Prince of Wales Island", and her two boarders who never seem to be able to pay their rent. These two are inventors bent on using their talents to gain fame as the first to go to the moon. This angers Miss China (what everyone calls her, as her real name is withheld throughout) to no end, because these men use what money they are able to finagle to purchase more and more equipment for their inventions. Mr. Breckinridge, an elderly gentleman, is the driving force between the two, while the younger, named Jim, provides all the material means for their experiments, and is also very fond of Miss China. Miss China is also fond of Jim, but she feels distant because she thinks he is seeing someone else (and she also wants to be paid). If there is any conflict in this story, this is it.

We later learn that the two inventors are not using a vehicle, such as a rocket, to travel to the moon. They have invented a "Space Reflex Telescope" which actually brings the moon to them. Jim leaves a "Happy Birthday" message on the moon's surface, and makes a ring for Miss China out of a moon rock. However, Miss China breaks her present in a drunken rage (thinking she is being made fun of), and this act grieves her to no end. But Jim wants to give her

the moon in a real sense, by breaking it in tiny pieces, and cause a ring of moon particles to encircle the earth.

This video is simple fun and whimsy for mature audiences (as there is some coarse language and adult situations), and it left me with good feelings about it. The character designs are some of the most "western" I have ever seen in a Japanese production, and the animation throughout is excellent. However, the part about this anime I like the most is the characters' interaction between one-another. The facial expressions are wonderful, and I feel I could truly enjoy watching this without any translation whatsoever. Sure, this tale is a "lightweight" compared to most anime I have seen, but it passes my acid test very well. I have seen better, but *Spirit of Wonder - Miss China's Ring* is a definite winner.

- John Beam

Ghost in the Shell
Manga Entertainment
82 minutes
not rated

Wow! That's one word that best describes the animation in *Ghost in the Shell*, released by Manga Entertainment, Inc., directed by Mamoru Oshii. It was a theatrical release, and is scheduled for release on videotape in June 1996, and on

laserdisc in September, 1996. The fact that it was planned as a theatrical release may explain why such care was taken on the animation. Whatever the reason, this is a movie that needs to be seen to be believed. The animation is phenomenal. There are some scenes which actually appear to be live action photography, such as a scene near the beginning of the movie which has "Major" Motoko Kusanagi sitting on a bed in front of a window in a dark room and a scene where a helicopter was flying at night through the city,

in front of the lit city windows. There was a scene towards the end where the "Major" was sitting in a chair that could have been a portrait.

Incredible attention was also paid to the smallest details. When we see the driver of a car pull away from the side of the road, the buildings seen through the rear window each change perspective. When the audience is seeing



something in the movie that is supposed to be from a tape or a video the animation was different, not as clean and concise. The moving cars in the background, the rust on the metal walls, the graffiti, the light and shadow on people and the clothes hanging from the clothes line, all this gives the film a more believable and realistic appeal that is not found in most animated films. This attention to detail gave me the feeling that it was treated with the same care a live action film would be. The backgrounds certainly were. They were treated like movie sets, instead of just something a character moves across. The people in the background scenes were extras, they each had their own facial character, their own identities, not the same face over and over used to give the illusion of a crowd. Another way to look at it, the backgrounds were treated the way a fine artist treats a landscape, painted with the same care and detail. The buildings in the cityscapes were unique and had their own individual architecture and character. It looked as if they could actually exist in a city somewhere in the world. Another detail often ignored in most animation, most all the personal weapons used by the character exist now. (I got this from a friend who knows about such things.)

Unlike the typical anime, the movement within the movie was choreographed realistically. The movement of the characters

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TOON NEWS – From Page 13

Thunderlizards segments because, in Holland's words, "the shows would suck without him."

Kopp has had some heavy duty company in the sound booth for *Eekstravaganza*. One of the show's trademarks is some high powered guest voices. Among the familiar voices that have graced the show are: Kathy Ireland as Huggy, a possessed "Precious Moments" type statue; Heather Locklear as Eek's obsessed (as in *Fatal Attraction*) new neighbor; Phil Hartman and Gary Owens as a cast of thousands; and Mr. T as the Thunderlizards' occasional field commander, Mr. T-Rex (ouch!).

Holland stresses the importance of a strong voice cast. "I think these guest stars are what help differentiate *Eek* from the other zany, kooky (see: loud and annoying) cartoon voices."

While he speaks well of virtually everyone who has worked on the show, he clearly has a particular fondness for William Shatner, who was Santa on the 1993 prime time *Eek! Christmas Special*, and, more recently, the strangely familiar Captain Berzerk in *Eek Space 9*. "Mr. Shatner has us on the floor when he comes in to record because he REALLY wants to make his character exceptional. He literally gets red in the face trying to give us the best character voice he can muster. It's incredible to watch."

Eek Space 9 also featured Gillian Anderson and David Duchovney in character as Scully and Mulder, a casting coup that predated more celebrated appearances on *ReBoot* and *The Simpsons*. (Scully has a change of heart when she encounters the Zoltarians, the slimy aliens who have been trying to blow up the Earth since season one's *Eek Vs. the Flying Saucers*.)

Strangely enough, this is only the latest in a series of crossovers between the two shows. A major *X Files* fan, Holland was both surprised and pleased when Eek and Annabelle appeared in the first season *X Files* episode *Eve*. He wrote an *X Files* parody called *Eex Files* as a thank you. (On a personal note, this episode also features the return of Shardy the Magical Dancing Piece of Glass in direct response to this writer's request while Savage and Bill interviewed with my husband for **ANIMATO!** #26. Thanks again, guys!)

Effective with the February sweeps, *Eekstravaganza* has left its longtime Saturday morning home in favor of a weekday afternoon slot. Here's hoping that the change expands the show from beloved cult hit to the mainstream popularity it deserves.

- Judith Reboy

Fan Club News

Longtime **ANIMATO!** readers know all about the Popeye Fan Club (1001 State St. Chester IL, 62233), but how many know about

the Betty Boop Fan Club?

Started in August of 1993 by Boop collector Kim Gordon, the club now boasts of over 100 members. For an annual membership fee of \$10.00 (\$15.00 in Canada), members receive an official fan club certificate, a Betty Boop Fan Club Pin, and monthly newsletters. To join, contact Kim Gordon at PO Box 42, Moorhead, MN 56561.

Speaking of the Popeye Fan Club, those folks in the Land of Segar have a website. Point your computer to www.midwest.net/orgs/ace1.

The Incredible Hulk Premiering this Fall on UPN Kids

Actors Lou Ferrigno, Luke Perry, Genie Francis, Mark Hamill, Shadoc Stevens, Neal McDonough and Matt Frewer are among the stellar vocal cast when the Hulk, the green beast who personifies the dark side of scientist Bruce Banner, makes his long awaited return to television in the animated series *The Incredible Hulk*. Based on the classic Marvel Comics superhero created by the legendary Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the series premieres this Fall as part of the *UPN KIDS* Sunday morning line-up.

The Incredible Hulk centers around the two faces of Doctor Bruce Banner after an evil scientist sabotages the Gamma Nuclear Reactor, Banner's work-in-progress on a military base. When the project explodes, Banner's exposed to a massive dose of radiation. Normally a reserved, studious man, Banner now finds that when angered, he transforms into The Incredible Hulk, a huge green beast of immense strength and raw emotion. Although Banner is aware he's metamorphosing into this mysterious raging entity, once he returns to normal, he has no recollection of what the Hulk has done or where he has been. Few are aware that Banner is also the Hulk and while the military aims to stop the menacing creature, Banner, who is suspected of undermining his own project, is wanted in the name of National Security. Knowing that someone, somewhere has the answer to his problem, Banner sets out across the country to seek a cure. He must be wary of everyone, for now he's a hunted man.

The voice actors for the series' cast of characters, many culled from the annals of the popular comic books, are: Lou Ferrigno as The Hulk (who, from 1978-82, starred in the primetime television series of the same name), Neal McDonough as Dr. Bruce Banner, Luke Perry as Rick Jones, Genie Francis as Betty Ross, Kevin Schon as Major Talbot, Matt Frewer as The Leader, Mark Hamill as Gargoyle, Shadoc Stevens as Doc Samson, Thom Barry as Gabriel

Jones and John Vernon as General Ross.

Among the guest stars joining the vocal cast in the first season of exciting episodes are Peter Strauss as Dr. Walter Langkowski, Dorian Harewood as Jim Rhodes/War Machine, Robert Hays as Tony Stark/Iron Man, Lisa Zane as Jennifer Walters/She-Hulk, Richard Grieco as Ghost Rider and John Rhys Davies as Thor.

Stan Lee, Avi Arad and Rick Ungar are the executive producers. Tom Tataranowicz is the supervising producer and voice director. *The Incredible Hulk* is a production of Marvel Films/New World Animation.

Beginning in the Fall, *The Incredible Hulk* will air Sundays (10:00-10:30 a.m., ET/PT) on UPN. The other series joining the UPN KIDS slate are *The Mouse & The Monster* (9:00-9:30 a.m.), *Jumanji* (9:30-10:00 a.m.) and *B.A.D.* (Bureau of Alien Defenders) (10:30-11:00).

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Letters - From Page 4

More Voice Artists

Rick Causey
Mesa, AZ

I felt compelled to write you guys to thank you for putting out **ANIMATO!**. I feel putting the digest **ANIMATO!** in a collected volume is a real good idea. It's nice to have a fan animation mag that publishes regularly. *Animation Mag* comes out monthly, but since I don't give a flying leap about who's vice president of overseas licensing of "x" studio or the tech specs of a computer animation program someone trying to sell, it takes 6 or more *Animations* to equal one **ANIMATO!**. You guys are ahead in my book. I love the poll, but it's not fair to give us only 5 fave TV shows and characters. The 6th through 10th place faves get no points which skews the polls to older, more famous shows/characters.

Also I'm renewing my subscription, but I wasn't entirely sure it was expired. You should throw in a slip with the last mag of a sub to remind us to renew. Is Toon News a column or collection of press releases? (See answer above!) Did Mark Lungo forget to review my 4th fave TV show, *Earthworm Jim* or was it left out accidentally? (See answer below!)

Joe Barbera interview, he's a legend, and no one can deny his place with Mr. Hanna in animation history. But from reading that interview, I think maybe animation tastes may have passed him by. And I disagree with him that HB series had strong stories. Just watch the cartoon network if you can get it. Most HB shows were long on interesting voices and characters and short on plot and intelligence, except *The Flintstones*, of course. As far as backlash, I think the people he meets idolize HB. Nostalgic true believers seeking him out aren't exactly an unbiased, totally objective group. And voices? What about Tress MacNeille, Rob Paulsen, Jim Cummings, Dan Castellaneta, Maurice LaMarche, Jess Harnell, Charlie Adler, Joe Alasky, Kathie Souchie, etc. etc.....? HB had good voices, and Mel Blanc will always be missed, but today's voice people are great too!

Speaking of voice artists, keep up the interviews. Make them longer please - Hopefully, Tress, who's my fave, will be coming up soon. Well, keep up the great work!

P.S.. Hey cartoon fans, visit your local comic book shop. Most cartoon or original funny comics have poor sales and need the help. Jeff Smith's comic *Bone* is a good place to start.

Son of Addition

Mark Lungo

Middleburg Heights, OH

I'd like to make some additions to my overview of 1995 television animation from **ANIMATO!**

#34. First, my review of *Earthworm Jim* was accidentally excised from the article due to a clerical error. Here it is in all its glory.

EARTHWORM JIM

Producers: Universal Cartoon Studios, Flextech Plc., TCC

Animation Studio: Akom Production Company

Where to Find It: Kids' WB!, Saturdays, 11:30 AM + WGN cable, Sundays, 11:30AM

An ordinary worm becomes a superhero when a battle suit intended for the evil alien, Queen Slug-for-a-Butt literally falls on top of him. Afterwards, Jim and his pals Peter Puppy (no relation to *Hyperman's* Studd Puppy), Princess What's-Her-Name, and Snott (The Living Booger) fight such villains as Pyscrow, Evil the Cat and Professor Monkey-for-a-Head. *Earthworm Jim* is the only Kids' WB! series made by an outside studio, but its style of humor—irreverent, media-savvy, mildly vulgar—fits right in. After ABC's *Sonic the Hedgehog*, this hilarious program is the best cartoon ever based on a video game (for whatever that's worth).

And while I have this forum, there are two other statements I'd like to make:

1. After I completed the article, *Street Fighter* did a couple of pretty decent political intrigue episodes that raised my opinion of the show somewhat.

2. I still haven't managed to see *Budgie the Little Helicopter* or *Mumfie*.

Finally, I have some bad news for Steve Bissette: two more forthcoming *Land Before Time* sequels have been announced. Watch for *The Land Before Time V: More of the Same* and *The Land Before Time VI: Milk It Till It Bleeds*, coming soon to stores everywhere!

A Fan of Sam's

Ken Layton
Olympia, WA

Just finished reading issue 34 which I purchased from my local Barnes and Noble bookstore. I thought I was the only one who remembered seeing the Sam Singer tv cartoons. I must disagree with *Bucky* and *Pepito* being the worst cartoon made for tv...you haven't seen bad until you've seen *Spunky* and *Tadpole!* Singer did make more than one of the *Sinbad Jr.* cartoons. I believe he made at least a dozen before Hanna-Barbera took over and made some

changes. First change was a new theme song and the second change was new voices. Tim Matheson, who was fresh from *Jonny Quest* was chosen as Sinbad, Jr. and Mel Blanc was selected as Salty the Parrot. It's been a long time since I've seen all of these shows and I would like to see them again.

I was glad to read the story on Jackson Beck. He's been a favorite of mine for quite a while. I've finally had the chance to listen to several of his Superman radio programs of the 1940s. he's very versatile with his voice...so many characters! He also did parts in the Famous Studio Little Lulu cartoons, too. Please send best wishes to Mr. Beck for me. I like to mute the audio whenever a tv commercial comes one, but if it's one of his water seal or pizza tv commercials, I turn the sound back ON.

The Man Who Hated Laughter has been one program that I enjoyed as a teen. I have an audio cassette of it that I recorded in 1973. I do believe that Dayton Allen had done a voice or two in it also. How about doing a story on him?

An update on Sam Singer...thanks to information shared by Karl Cohen of ASIFA-San Francisco, we're happy to report that Sam Singer is alive and well and living in Los Angeles where he is marketing a portable animation "tote" board; a full-size revolving disc for 12 or 16 field mounted in a collapsible plywood stand. He can be reached at Sam Singer Productions, 1256 N. Hayworth Ave., West Hollywood, CA, 90046. 

Hearing Voices- From Page 29

and were employed by directors like Tex Avery (*A Feud There Was*), Friz Freleng (*Dog Daze*) and Bob Clampett (*Naughty Neighbors*).

This overview is necessarily incomplete - more research remains to be done, and space limits a fuller list of credits. My thanks to Thurl Ravenscroft (still being heard an unbelievable sixty years on as the voice of Tony the Tiger for Kellogg's TV commercials), Ray Erlenborn and Chuck Jones for their gracious giving of time and memories, as well as to my co-collaborators Hames Ware and Graham Webb, and Mark Kausler for supplying many titles.

Until next time, keep listening to those old cartoons, for you never know who you might hear! 

Keith Scott is a voice artist and historian headquartered in Australia.

LaMarche - From Page 17

Space Monkeys from Epoch Ink. A intergalactic spoof about a spacecraft commanded by an evolved ape, LaMarche plays Dr. Splitz, an orangutan with two personalities. Considering this is the actor who did 27 different voices in one show, two voices won't be too much of a stretch!



Anime - From Page 59

was fluid and natural. No exaggerated leaps or jumps by fully human characters. Vehicle performance also adhered to the laws of physics. No two wheel turns by four wheeled cars. In most anime, slow motion is used to showcase an unnatural event or act by the characters. However, in *Ghost in the Shell*, the director used slow motion to emphasize the action which would otherwise have been too fast to see.

"Wow!", however, is not a word that could be applied to the storyline. The first time I saw the movie in a theatre, I left feeling that I got the gist of the story but missed most of the details. This could have been due to the fact that I was drooling at the animation. However, the second time I saw it I was still trying to figure out exactly what was happening. The main character "Major" Motoko Kusanagi is a cyborg, with only part of her brain still original. The story, set in the near future, revolves around her and her team's (Bateau and Togusa) attempt to catch an international criminal known as the "Puppet-master". He ghost-hacks into people and gives them false experience and memories to get them to do what he wants. A ghost is the conscious (soul, maybe) and personality of a person. I'm still not sure how someone could hack into that. The characters were well developed. They had personalities and you were able to relate to their situations and actions. On the other hand, the plot doesn't flow well. In the beginning the Major's boss, Aramaki, asked for information about the upcoming talks and later we find out why. It makes it hard when the story doesn't flow from one point to another, but backtracks. There are phrases and soliloquies that sound really metaphoric when you hear them but really don't relate to the action very well. The movie was based on a series of comics, written by Masamune Shirow, and maybe if I had read them the story would have flowed better. However, not having read the comics, it will take a couple of times seeing the film to really understand all that is happening.

- Celina Brooks



Cobbler and Thief - From Page 45

believed that building up the romance between the leads and the inclusion of the three songs by Robert Folk and Norman Gimbal were essential in building up the film's commercial appeal. The songs advance the plot and the relationship of the characters, and are used in the same way the Disney studio uses songs in its films.

So, if an acceptable version of this film existed, then why re-structure it?

In *The Los Angeles Times* article of August 30, 1995, Eberts is quoted as saying, "It was significantly enhanced and changed by Miramax after Miramax stepped in and acquired the domestic [distribution] rights. They made extremely good changes."

Eberts may have struck a brave pose for the press, but Miramax's treatment of the film didn't translate into respectable receipts at the box office. The film opened on only 510 screens, and grossed just over \$300,000. In most areas, the film was out of first-run within two weeks.

In an effort to make Williams' work more accessible for family audiences, Miramax made a number of changes. Rather than try to sell the film as a modern milestone in animation and emphasize the film's strengths, the powers-to-be at the company tried to sell it as another kiddie show.

The company changed the title to *Arabian Knight* which smacks of the worst of back-room brainstorming. It's not an accurate title (no one in the film is referred to as an "Arabian knight") and it makes a self-serving reference to Disney's *Aladdin*.

The company re-dubbed the film using "name" actors as an effort to build the box office appeal of the film. The completely acceptable performances by Bobbi Page as Princess Yum Yum and Steve Lively as Tack were replaced by performances by Jennifer Beals and Matthew Broderick. Additional lines were given to Tack, and, in a move that was decidedly bone-headed, the Thief was given a "voice."

Actually the Thief's "voice" is his thoughts, ("The Thief was a man of few words, but many thoughts," Broderick explained in the film), and these thoughts are voiced by Jonathan Winters. Designed to sound like ad libs, Winters' lines come across flat and very unfunny. They detract from the visuals, instead of adding to them.

Miramax also made the decision to cut the Mad Holy Witch sequence out of an apparent commercial concern. The Mad Holy Witch is a wizened old woman with elongated and floppy breasts. One doesn't have to be Einstein to see the concern of possible ratings problems here.

To complicate matters, at the end of the scene, she breathes in vapors, swoons a bit, lights a match and explodes! A drug and self-immolation reference may have also been responsible for killing the scene.

Miramax eliminated any box office draw that Williams' name might have by never mentioning in any ad that the film was from the "animation director of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*."

According to Williams' son, Alexander, who was working on the film, there was only about four months work left when the Completion Bond Co. took over the project. The legacy of finger-pointing and mystery unfortunately overshadow the accomplishments of the film, but at the heart of the controversy is a very thorny issue.

In these kinds of stories, the good guys are always the artists who are victimized by the villainous money people, and the white and black hats are easy to see. But what about an artist, working in a very competitive commercial medium, who can't finish a project that has taken almost 30 years of his life? What responsibilities are assumed when an artist accepts outside funding in order to complete his project? What Miramax did to Richard Williams' work is inexcusable, but what about what Williams did to himself?

In a perfect world, an artist would be allowed to present his or her work unedited and untouched. Commercial animation is not a perfect world. Perhaps one day, someone will release *The Princess and The Cobbler* to laser disc and include as much of Williams' out-take animation as exists.

After several years of low key activity, Richard Williams once again is making himself known in animation circles. He is teaching animation in seminars in Los Angeles and London, and there are reports of his planning another feature.

Fred Calvert, who expressed nothing but admiration for Williams' skill as an animator, hopes Williams will be very active again.

"There is a quote from Chekhov, 'Talent forgives all,'" he said.



This article would not have been possible without the assistance of Luke Menichelli, Fred Calvert, Jerry Beck, James Gilbey, and the publicity office of Miramax Films. A special tip of the hat to Eric Lurio for alerting me to this story.



FROM THE INKWELL



In a recent issue of *USA Today*, actor Tony Jay was profiled about his work as Claude Frollo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The Shakespeare-trained actor is a busy character performer who has appeared on numerous television shows and movies such as *Twins* and *My Stepmother is an Alien*. His work as Frollo was been applauded, which to many is especially gratifying as he is the only "non-name" actor with a major role in the voice cast.

Jay is no stranger to voice work in animation as he had made appearances on *Savage Dragon* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and is currently recording the co-starring role of Jarlsberg on Bruce Willis' new syndicated cartoon series *Bruno the Kid*.

The piece in *USA Today* ended with a quote from Jay which caught my attention: "Even with his distinguished stage background, Jay is not one to look down on voice work. As for cartoons, 'You'd be surprised to see who comes in. David Warner, Bronson Pinchot, JoBeth Williams, Tim Curry. The days of Mel Blanc (the voice of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck) are gone. The need for real actors is much greater since there is more realism in cartoons.'"

"[italic mine]
So Mel Blanc wasn't an actor? Hmm...I thought the definition of acting was the creation of a characterization. Now let's see, Blanc created (with the guidance of his directors) the voices for about a dozen major cartoons characters. In many of his shorts he provided all the major

voices, which meant he was acting against himself. The voices he created were decidedly different from his own natural speaking voice.

But Mel Blanc, to my knowledge, was not a veteran of The Stage and was not an interpreter of the Bard like Mr. Jay. Therefore Blanc was not an Actor.

Blanc isn't around to name-drop, but I'm sure his years on radio with a comedy genius like Jack Benny, and working with Academy Award-winners such as Friz Freleng and Chuck Jones would not be as impressive as the refugees from sit-coms and USA Network movies of the week who Jay proudly cites as distinguished colleagues.

Well, Mr. Jay, here's some cold hard truth for you. Mel Blanc's work in animation will be long remembered after your contribution becomes an answer to a trivia question. It's a sad thing for someone to try to enhance their own reputation by pulling down others, especially other performers who are not here to defend themselves. How long did it take for you to create the voice for Frollo? Funny thing, it sounded like your natural speaking voice or at least the voice you've used in your movie roles.

* * * *

Thanks once again to Kevin Clement and all his staff at ChillerCon. Steve Bissette and I manned the combination *Tyrant/ANIMATO!* table at the April gathering at the beautiful New Jersey Meadowlands and got the chance of meeting many readers and

even several advertisers. The mail order/retail arm of **ANIMATO!**, Inkwell Productions, made its debut there offering animation merchandise and some great videotapes from Bosko Video and Snappy Video.

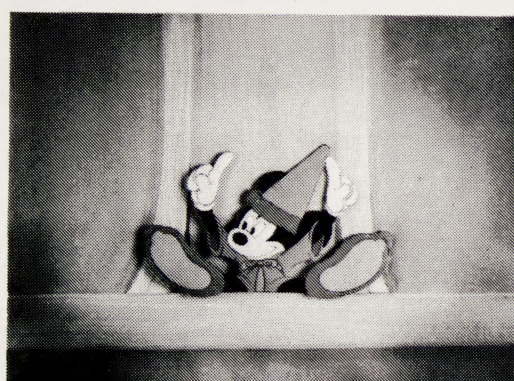
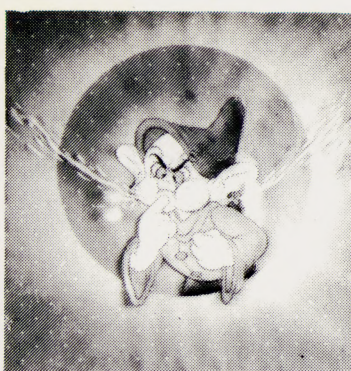
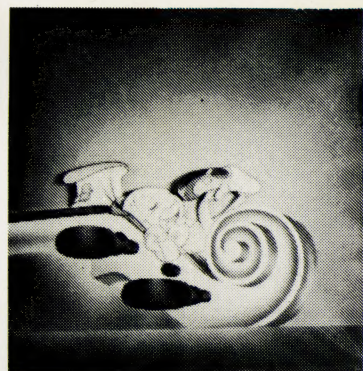
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Speaking of which, some of you might see out mail order ad and react in horror. Has **ANIMATO!** sold out? Nope! Our readership and distribution is growing, but we are always looking for constructive ways to keep the magazine on the right financial track. Offering quality videotapes from small companies seemed to be a good way to augment our income. We'll be adding more merchandise with each issue to keep the selection fresh.

* * * *

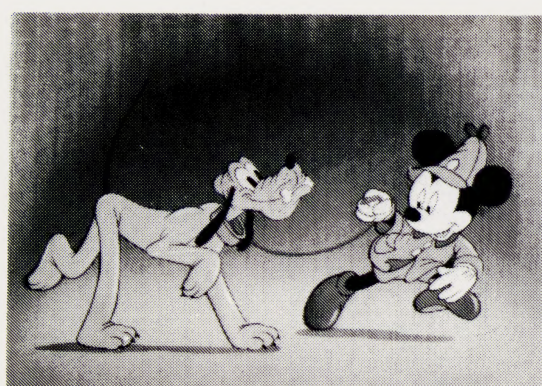
Our newest columnist this issue is our own Gene Gumbs, who has been a key member of the **ANIMATO!** team since issue 24. Gene will be reviewing animation web pages as a on-going column in the magazine. Gene's a family man with a lovely wife and two bouncy daughters; he's a son of the Nutmeg State, and he is a up-and-coming sports broadcaster on both television and radio. If you have a website you'd like review, e-mail Gene (ggumbs@ix.netcom.com).

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